

Excess baggage

The plastic carrier bag is useful, ubiquitous and, to its growing band of enemies around the world, an environmental scourge(1) and symbol of our throwaway society.

Each year, humanity gets through something like billions of carrier bags, which together weigh approximately 5 million tonnes and use about 50 million barrels of oil to produce.

5 Yet they are used on average for 20 minutes, after which, say the critics, the bag survives as rubbish for a further 1,000 years.

Few people have a good word for them. Floating on the ocean, they are said by marine conservation organisations to choke some 100,000 whales, seals, dolphins and turtles each year. Turtles mistake them for jellyfish(2) and eat them, only to have their
10 guts(3) blocked - a turtle was washed ashore in Scotland in 1998 with seven plastic bags blocking its alimentary tract. In 2002, a whale that washed up(4) on a Normandy beach had 800g of plastic waste - including two UK supermarket bags - tangled in its intestines. But it is as litter that plastic bags most offend. The Marine Conservation Society's surveys in 2003/04 recorded 40 plastic bags per kilometre of Britain's coastline.

15 But the plastic bag's days may be numbered. At least 40 countries or states are now known to have banned them or taken action to restrict their use. The movement began in the 1980s in Dhaka Bangladesh, where millions of plastic bags were found to be clogging(5) drains(6) in the monsoons, causing terrible flooding. The city's 26 major plastic bag makers complained bitterly at proposals to outlaw them, but in March 2002
20 Bangladesh became the first country to ban them outright. The case was taken up in northern India, where plastic bags not only caused floods but were blamed for killing cows. In August 2003, plastic bags were banned - on pain of seven years in prison or a £1,250 fine. Similar laws now apply in several other Indian states.

No European country has yet banned them outright, but several - including Ireland,
25 Denmark and Switzerland - have imposed a "plastax", a tax on plastic bags. Last week, France went potentially the furthest, saying the bags would be completely banished after 2010. A French supermarket chain has stopped providing them for more than a year without, it seems, any effect on its sales. The UK, however, stands firmly in the "do nothing" camp - much to the distress of environmentalists.

Source: "The Guardian", October 26, 2005 (adapted)

Vocabulary

(1) a scourge: *un fléau*

(2) jellyfish: *méduse*

(3) guts: *intestins*

(4) to wash up: *rejeter sur le rivage*

(5) to clog: *obstruer*

(6) drains: *égouts*

A. Répondez en français aux questions suivantes, en utilisant uniquement les informations contenues dans le texte. Composez des phrases complètes et justifiez toujours vos réponses. (9 points)

1. Comment le début de l'article présente-t-il le sac plastique ? (1 pt)
2. Que nous apprend le texte sur la production des sacs plastique, leur utilisation et leur durée de vie ? (2 pts)
3. Dans quel milieu naturel les sacs plastiques posent-ils un problème particulièrement aigu et pourquoi ? (1 pt)
4. Que s'est-il passé en Ecosse et en Normandie ? (1 pt)
5. Quand et où a-t-on commencé à réagir au problème des sacs plastique et dans quelles circonstances ? (2 pts)
6. Quelles solutions a-t-on choisies dans certains pays européens ? (2 pts)

B. Traduisez en français la fin du texte (3 points)

de la ligne 27 "*A French supermarket chain...*" à la ligne 29 "*...environmentalists.*"

C. Une enquête a enregistré les réactions des clients à propos de la suppression des sacs plastique. Recopiez les propos de ces clients en mettant les verbes à la forme exigée par le contexte. (4 points)

1. "I (to use) carrier bags as bin liners for many years now. If plastic bags (to be banished), I (to have to) buy other bags to replace them."
2. "Last week I (to go) to a supermarket and they (not to give) me anything to carry my shopping in!"
3. "I'm becoming more aware of the need (to protect) the planet and I'm going to stop (to use) plastic bags. I (not to want) my children to live in a world of rubbish."

D. Write 10 lines in English about what you can do in your daily life to protect the environment. Give a few precise examples. (4 points)