

- **Published Date:** 13 March 2008
- **Source:** The Scotsman
- **Location:** Scotland
- **Related Topics:** [The Budget](#)

## Retailers urged to take action or face levy to cut plastic bag use

ALISTAIR Darling made public his widely expected plan to introduce charges on plastic bags if retailers do not take steps to reduce their use.

The Chancellor said legislation would allow the government to impose a charge on single-use bags early next year, "if we have not seen sufficient progress on a voluntary basis".

In the Budget, he said: "Given the damage that single-use carrier bags inflict on the environment, we want to be able to take action."

The money raised by a plastic bag levy under powers provided by Climate Change Bill legislation would go to environmental charities. It could reduce plastic bag use by 90 per cent, with around 12 billion fewer bags in circulation, Mr Darling said.

About 13 billion plastic bags are given out free to UK shoppers every year and take 1,000 years to decay.

Yesterday's announcement came after campaigns to ban plastic bags, which were endorsed by the Prime Minister.

Last month, Gordon Brown said the government was ready to force supermarkets to reduce use of plastic bags, and hailed retailers such as Ikea for phasing them out last year.

As early as last November, in his first major speech on the environment since becoming Prime Minister, Mr Brown signalled that the days were numbered for throw-away plastic bags. "I am convinced we can eliminate single-use disposable bags in favour of long-lasting and more sustainable alternatives," he told a WWF event.

As the Chancellor made his Budget announcement, the Body Shop became the latest high-profile retailer to take steps to reduce plastic bag use.

The cosmetics chain said it was ending the use of degradable plastic bags from August 2008, and switching to 100 per cent recycled paper bags. Alastair Kerr, the Body Shop UK managing director, said: "We are proud to announce our decision to end the use of degradable plastic bags and to source 100 per cent recycled paper carrier bags, produced to the highest environmental and ethical standards."

Last month, Marks & Spencer announced it was to charge food customers 5p for every plastic carrier bag they use, with the money raised from the levy spent on improving parks and play areas across the country.

And in response to Conservative claims of hypocrisy, even the government's marketing arm – the Central Office of Information – announced it would stop using plastic bags for promotional purposes.

The drive has attracted support from all kinds of retailers, with the charity Help the Aged announcing last week that it was phasing out plastic bags from its 365 second-hand shops around the country, stopping about two million bags finding their way to landfill.

A complete end to handing out bags in its shops will come into effect on 2 June, during National Recycling Week, the charity said.

And Mr Darling's pledge won the backing of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE). Ben Stafford, the conservation charity's head of campaigns, said: "With limited signs that a voluntary approach to tackling the blight of plastic bags will work, the government is right to flag more robust measures through this Budget.

"Litter is a highly-visible problem that suggests a lack of concern for the state of our towns and countryside." The Green Party said the only way to achieve a "serious and sustainable" decrease in national levels of plastic bag waste was for the government to introduce a bag tax.

### **MEET THE WOMAN WHOSE GREAT IDEA IS IN THE BAG**

VIVIEN McKee, right is the managing director of Get Serious World – a new Glasgow-based business promoting the use of reusable jute bags.

When she set up her company in October last year Ms McKee knew it was an idea evolved at a perfect time. Her business meant she was delighted to hear Alistair Darling promise to get tough on companies which continue to use disposable plastic bags.

Unless dramatic steps are taken to reduce the number of plastic bags used by British businesses the Chancellor warned he would consider compulsory charges for bags to be introduced in 2009.

Ms McKee, whose company imports jute bags from India and supplies them to businesses so they can be reused by customers, was delighted to hear the Chancellor address the issue so close to her heart.

The Glasgow based businesswoman, who already has a contract with RBS, said: "It is excellent news for us. Retailers are going to be looking at making changes over the next year. It means this country will have to make improvements to bring us into line with the work already being done in places like Denmark and the Republic of Ireland."

She added: "It is a very green Budget. It will be an amazing opportunity for other entrepreneurs to set up businesses with green credentials. It's a huge opportunity."

*Last Updated: 13 March 2008 1:49 PM*

**Find this article at:**

<http://news.scotsman.com/uk/Retailers-urged-to-take-action.3876278.jp>