

News story: Plastic bag sales in 'big seven' supermarkets down 86% since 5p charge

Plastic bag sales in England's 'big seven' supermarkets have dropped by 86% since the Government introduced its 5p plastic bag charge in 2015, helping to tackle the devastating impact of plastic waste on our environment.

[New figures](#) reveal customers of the country's biggest supermarkets bought nearly a quarter fewer plastic bags last year compared to 2016/17 – a decrease of nearly 300 million bags.

This is equivalent to just 19 bags per person in England, compared to 140 bags since the government introduced a 5p charge in 2015 – a dramatic reduction of 86%.

Welcoming today's figures, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

These figures demonstrate the collective impact we can make to help the environment by making simple changes to our daily routines. We want businesses to continue to look at what they can do to help improve our environment to leave it in a better state than we found it.

It is only by working together we will reverse the rising tide of plastic waste finding its way into our rivers, seas and oceans and the catastrophic impact this is having on our marine environment.

Plastic bags have a significant impact on the environment. Government scientists believe plastic in the sea is set to treble in a decade unless marine litter is curbed – with one million birds and over 100,000 sea mammals dying every year from eating and getting tangled in plastic waste.

A recent study by Cefas revealed since the 5p charge on plastic bags was introduced, which has taken over 9 billion plastic bags out of circulation, there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter.

Thomas Maes, Marine Litter Scientist at Cefas said:

Every plastic bag not purchased is one which will not end up in our sea, damaging habitats or harming marine life. Since efforts from across Europe came into effect, including the UK's 5p charge, we have observed a sharp decline in the percentage of plastic bags captured by fishing nets on our trawl surveys of the seafloor around the UK as compared to 2010.

It is encouraging to see the efforts to reduce plastic bag usage by all of society, whether the public, industry, NGOs or government. These figures show that by working together we can tackle the marine litter problem by reducing, reusing and recycling.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting our seas, oceans and marine life. The Government has recently announced a range of measures to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste including a [world-leading ban on microbeads](#) and proposals to extend the 5p plastic bag charge and explore plastic free aisles in supermarkets.

Earlier this year we announced our intention to [ban the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds](#), plans for a [deposit return scheme](#) to increase recycling rates of drinks bottles and cans, and launched a [call for evidence](#) on using the tax system or charges to address single-use plastic waste.

Today's figures also reveal that for 2017/18 5p plastic bag sales contributed nearly £60m toward charities and other good causes.

Background

1. The seven biggest retailers in the UK are Asda, Marks and Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury, The Co-operative Group, Tesco and Waitrose.
2. The figure that plastic in the sea is set to treble is taken from the [Future of the Sea](#) report.
3. The statistic that there has been an estimated 50% reduction in plastic bag marine litter since the 5p plastic bag charge was introduced in 2015 is from Cefas's [Below the Surface](#) report.

[Press release: Report on state of air quality in England highlights urgent action needed on ammonia emissions](#)

A rise in ammonia emissions is having a damaging effect on wildlife and habitats, according to the Environment Agency's first ever report on England's air quality, published today. [The report](#) shows that, unlike other main air pollutants, emissions of ammonia have increased since 2013.

Ammonia deposition can overload land and water with nitrogen; it acidifies soils, natural habitats, and freshwaters. These effects reduce biodiversity in sensitive habitats creating a knock-on effect for our wildflower species, aquatic and insect life. The report shows of England's nitrogen-sensitive habitats, 95% are affected by nitrogen deposition.

The vast majority of UK ammonia emissions, 88%, come from the agricultural sector as a result of such activities as fertiliser use and slurry storage. Higher concentrations and deposition levels are associated with areas of intensive livestock production, especially dairy and beef.

The Environment Agency is today calling on farmers to take urgent action by changing land management practices and becoming more nitrogen efficient. A new Code of Good Agricultural Practice designed in collaboration with farming organisations, DEFRA and the Environment Agency is being published today to help farmers improve their land management and reduce ammonia emissions.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Urgent action is needed if we are going to tackle the hidden blight of ammonia emissions. These emissions are having a detrimental impact on the environment, precious habitats and wildlife. As custodians of the land, farmers must take the lead by changing their land management practices.

More broadly, poor air quality is bad for the environment but also people's health and wellbeing. This report also shows the need to tackle the high levels of nitrogen dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter that persist in certain areas. Improvement to air quality is going to require action from nations, government at a national and local level, organisations, and communities – but just as importantly – individuals.

Huge improvements in air quality since the 1970s

The report shows the progress made in reducing air pollution over recent decades. Since 1970 in the UK:

- Nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions have reduced by 72%
- Particulate matter (PM₁₀) has reduced by 73%.
- Sulphur Dioxide (SO₂) has reduced by 97%
- Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC) have reduced by 66%

These emissions come from a range of sources including vehicles emissions and industrial processes. By working with the industries, the Environment Agency has helped to contribute to these reductions and will continue to do so through future regulation.

However, while legal limits are being met for the majority of pollutants, high levels of nitrogen dioxide, ozone and particulate matter remain in many urban areas with high concentrations around homes and schools, and are consequently a major public health concern. Furthermore, under current projections, emission reduction targets for 2030 will not be met for ammonia, NO_x, NMVOCs, SO₂ and PM_{2.5} without further action. Particulate matter can have impacts on health even below current legal thresholds.

The Government has moved to address these issues by publishing its Clean Air Strategy. Clean Air is the first of the ten major goals set in the 25 Year Environment Plan, which contains important commitments aimed at curbing emissions from combustion plants and generators, ending the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040, and improving industrial emissions further by building on existing good practice and the successful regulatory framework. The Clean Air Strategy is currently out for public consultation until mid- August. To comment please go to the [Clean Air Stratgey Consultation](#)

News story: Free holiday activities and meals for disadvantaged families

A series of projects, backed by £2million of government funding, will be run across the country including the North East, Birmingham and London, providing activities such as free football classes, play sessions and cooking classes.

These projects, running across the summer, will also provide free meals for the most disadvantaged families who may rely on the Free School Meals they receive during term time.

Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi said:

For most pupils, the end of the school summer term signals the start of holidays, days out and a chance to make memories with friends and family. Other families, who might rely on the support provided by schools, are not so lucky.

These projects will provide a range of support for families during the summer break. They will also give children access to experiences that won't just create great memories but will help broaden their horizons and build the confidence they need to succeed in whatever path they choose to follow.

Academic standards are rising across the country and there are now 1.9 million more children in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010. Most importantly, the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers has already shrunk by 10% at GCSE and 10.5% at KS2 since 2011.

Today's announcement is the latest in a series of government backed schemes to help disadvantaged children. These include the £2.25billion Pupil Premium, Free School Meals and most recently a £26million investment to kick-start or improve breakfast clubs in at least 1,700 schools.

Commenting on the announcement, Lindsay Graham, independent policy advisor who has campaigned on this issue in the past, said:

The school holidays can be a challenging and costly time for families, particularly for those on a limited income or whose children are reliant on term time free school meals.

The need for community led enrichment opportunities for children, young people and their families is paramount for helping the most disadvantaged in our society. Early research in the UK is telling us that these types of projects can make a difference.

Evidence suggests that attending out-of-school activities can have a positive impact on children's educational, health and well-being outcomes. The projects announced today will be run by Children North East, Family Action, Feeding Britain, Birmingham Holiday Kitchen, Onside Youth Zones, Street Games and TLG (Transforming Lives for Good).

This funding comes after the government announced that it would run a targeted pilot programme in the 2019 Easter and summer holidays.

This work aims to support children's education by:

- testing the effectiveness of interventions
- looking at take-up of provision
- identifying the costs involved
- considering whether there are particular areas where this kind of programme would be most effective

To ensure this work is implemented effectively, ministers will work closely with Frank Field MP and expert stakeholders, as it develops.

[News story: New guide for farmers to help reduce air pollution from ammonia](#)

A new guide published today sets out the steps farmers, advisors and contractors can take to reduce ammonia emissions and help improve air quality.

Our [Clean Air Strategy](#) highlights that agriculture is responsible for 88% of UK emissions of ammonia gas, which 'over-fertilises' natural habitats with nitrogen and combines with other pollutants to produce fine Particulate Matter pollution which is harmful to human health.

The Code of Good Agricultural Practice (COGAP) for Reducing Ammonia Emissions

sets out simple steps all farmers can take to reduce ammonia emissions, such as using a nutrient management plan to calculate fertiliser application rates.

It also includes more significant changes to slurry storage, spreading equipment and infrastructure, alongside innovative techniques such as slurry and digestate acidification and separation.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Air pollution is not just an urban issue and with 88% of ammonia emissions coming from farming, the government is taking concerted action.

With clear new guidance and financial support we will help farmers across the country to take action, reduce emissions and help improve air quality.

In addition to the new guidance, Defra is providing a package of financial and technical advice to help farmers reduce their emissions.

Defra is investing £3 million over the next three years to fund a specialist team of experts who will offer support, advice and guidance on the most effective ways to reduce emissions from ammonia on their land.

It will also fund demonstrations of the latest low-emission spreading equipment and one-to-one advice on reducing ammonia emissions which will be available from Catchment Sensitive Farming officers by the end of this year.

The RDPE Countryside Productivity scheme is currently offering 40% grants towards much of the manure management equipment recommended in the COGAP to reduce ammonia emissions. This includes low-emission spreading equipment, slurry and digestate storage bags, digestate processing equipment and mild acidification equipment. Farmers in priority catchments for reducing water pollution may also be eligible for grants towards covers for slurry stores and lagoons under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

The voluntary code has been written by Defra in collaboration with the National Farmers Union (NFU), the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board and the Agricultural Industries Confederation.

Contributions have also been made by other organisations including ADAS, the British Egg Council, the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, the Environment Agency, Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF), the National Association of Agricultural Contractors, Natural England, Plantlife and the Tenant Farmers Association.

The guide includes information on how to reduce emissions when:

- storing organic manure
- applying organic manure

- applying manufactured nitrogen fertiliser
- feeding livestock
- housing livestock

NFU environment forum chairman Mark Pope said:

The NFU welcomes the launch of the Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Reducing Ammonia Emissions. The code contains a variety of measures to reduce ammonia emissions on farm, which in many instances provide multiple benefits to the environment and resource efficiency.

Farmers have recognised there is a need to reduce their ammonia emissions and the sector has made improvements with levels dropping by 10% in the past 30 years. However, further reductions are required from the industry in order to meet targets set under the Government's Clean Air Strategy. We urge Defra to continue to offer farmers guidance on this issue alongside targeted financial support where necessary.

Robert Sheasby, chief executive of the Agricultural Industries Confederation (AIC), which represents companies delivering both inputs and advice to farmers said:

We are pleased to note that the new code recognises the importance of professional advisers in guiding farm practice. Those on the Feed Adviser Register and FACTS Qualified Advisers are already undertaking additional training that will update some 4,500 professionals on the code's requirements.

By delivering advice tailored to the needs of individual farms, their crops and livestock, we will make a significant contribution to meeting Defra's ambition for productivity and ammonia mitigation.

Jill Hewitt, Technical Consultant at the National Association of Agricultural Contractors added;

Spreading manures, slurry and digestate waste has become a predominantly contractor operation and the NAAC welcomes new guidance to help farmers and contractors make decisions about the best way to apply waste to land to maximise nutrient content, and minimise air pollution.

Nigel Penlington, Head of Environment and Buildings at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board said;

There is increasing pressure on farmers to control ammonia so we welcome this as a first step to help raise awareness and provide simple, practical steps to make a difference on the farm, improve the image of farming and its environmental performance and, at the same time, save farmers money and provide some benefits to the health and welfare of livestock and crop health,

Press release: New plans for probation in Wales announced by UK Government

- Supervision of all offenders in Wales will be brought together into the National Probation Service (NPS), to better reflect the needs of communities in Wales.
- Changes will strengthen the supervision of offenders and increase public confidence in community sentences.
- CRC contracts will end two years early in 2020, with plans to work with the market to design new and improved contracts for rehabilitation services

Widespread reforms to the way probation is delivered in Wales have been announced by the UK Government, to strengthen the supervision of offenders and increase confidence in community sentences.

A consultation document published today outlines the Ministry of Justice's intention to use flexibilities in the existing devolution settlement to bring the supervision of all offenders in Wales into NPS Wales – so a single organisation is responsible for managing all offenders taking a holistic and unified approach to probation.

In the future, CRC and NPS areas will be aligned, with ten new probation regions in England, simplifying and strengthening ties with key local partners and creating opportunities to co-commission rehabilitation services with PCCs.

Reforms to probation in 2015, known as 'Transforming Rehabilitation', were challenging, ambitious and have led to 40,000 extra offenders a year receiving support and supervision on release – a positive change for public safety.

This additional monitoring has been carried out by newly formed, 'Community Rehabilitation Companies' who manage low and medium-risk offenders, and the publicly funded NPS, who manage higher-risk offenders.

Existing arrangements mean that the make-up and delivery of probation services in Wales is already different to England, with prison and probation

services overseen entirely by HMPPS Wales – paving the way for changes to the current system.

Criminal justice in Wales is a reserved matter and the responsibility of the UK Government. However, other agencies such as healthcare, education and social services are devolved, and we will continue to work closely with these key organisations.

To reflect this, today's consultation sets out proposals to bring the supervision of all offenders in Wales into the NPS and explore how wider partners can help to improve rehabilitative support for offenders, by better joining up with health, housing and the third sector.

The new model will support greater integration with these key services – building on the positive work that is already happening through the All Wales Criminal Justice Board.

Probation partners in Wales have already come together collaboratively to join up the delivery of rehabilitation and resettlement services, which provides a unique opportunity to build on these positive partnerships and improve the offering of services across the country.

Justice Secretary David Gauke said:

I want a probation service in Wales that not only keeps the public safe but one that fundamentally reduces reoffending, by giving offenders the support they need to contribute positively to the community and turn their lives around.

This is an exciting opportunity to create a probation service in Wales that brings together vital services and strengthens existing partnerships.

We want to see a greater emphasis on community sentences, and less reliance on short custodial sentences, so they are only used as a last resort – but to do this we must have a probation service that commands the confidence of the courts.

I am confident the steps we are outlining today will build on the positive progress in Wales and improve rehabilitation – so we can ultimately cut the cost of reoffending.

Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

The plans announced today underline the UK Government's firm commitment to cutting reoffending with the support of an effective, stable probation service.

We want to see offenders in Wales successfully rehabilitated so they turn away from crime and make a positive contribution to

society.

We now want to engage with a wide range of stakeholders across Wales to seek views on these proposals, listen to the experiences and suggestions of others, and to work with the Welsh Government to refine our plans for improving probation services across the nation.

While CRCs have reduced the overall number of people reoffending, it is clear that private probation providers have faced significant challenges. Unforeseen changes in the types of offenders coming to the courts and the sentences they receive have substantially reduced CRC income and affected the quality of frontline services.

That is why today's consultation document sets out urgent action that will be taken to address these issues – ending the current CRC contracts early in 2020, improving supervision and through-the-gate support in the meantime, and using lessons learnt so far to put in place improved services with more effective commercial arrangements.

Alongside the structural and contractual changes, a new professional register will be introduced, helping staff to move between roles and develop their careers. The consultation also seeks views on improving the training and development of staff.

The consultation will seek to gather views and expertise from a range of potential providers, including the voluntary sector, as well as other stakeholders, and will inform the future delivery of probation services in England and Wales.

Notes to editors:

- There are currently 21 CRCs: one in Wales and 20 in England.
- There are seven NPS regions: six in England and one in Wales.
- Under the new proposals ten new probation regions will be created in England. Each will contain one CRC and one NPS area and be overseen by one HMPPS leader.
- Under current arrangements, the National Probation Service (NPS) manages higher-risk offenders, with the CRCs managing low and medium-risk offenders.
- Criminal justice powers are not devolved, however the Welsh Government are responsible for aspects of the probation service such as health, education and social services.
- The consultation will last for eight weeks and the findings will be used to inform future delivery of probation.