



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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from: General Secretariat  
to: Delegations

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Subject: Measures Concerning the Use of Plastic Carrier Bags  
- Information by the Austrian delegation

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Delegations will find attached an information note from the Austrian delegation on the above topic, to be dealt with under "other business" at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 14 March 2011.

**Measures Concerning the Use of Plastic Carrier Bags  
- Information by the Austrian Delegation -**

The mass of single-use plastic carrier bags put into circulation annually within the European Union is estimated at 800 000 tons. Plastic does not degrade for a long time, which makes possible multiple use, recycling and finally, if bags are incinerated, use of the resulting energy. For the same reason, dumping into landfill and careless discarding of plastic bags should be prevented, to protect health as well as the environment.

Plastic carrier bags are classified as packaging under the current Packaging Directive (whether free of charge or paid for) and are therefore subject to the corresponding national transpositions of the Directive. Packaging that complies with the basic requirements of the Directive cannot be banned. Furthermore, waste management offers no possibilities to treat this kind of packaging differently than packaging consisting of other materials, since the Directive covers packaging of any kind.

A number of national initiatives to conserve resources and to leverage the principle of waste avoidance already exist within the European Union, aiming to reduce the use of plastic carrier bags to a minimum. They range from taxes on packaging and waste disposal (whose costs the producers usually pass on to the consumers), through fees for plastic carrier bags (going e.g. to a recycling fund), to voluntary labelling of plastic carrier bags and labelling of biodegradable bags. These measures are in some cases supported and promoted by media campaigns, e.g. for the use of reusable bags.

To make such measures as effective as possible, Austria would like to invite the European Commission to analyse the following issues on a European level:

- evaluation of existing regulations concerning plastic carrier bags in EU countries;
- possible introduction of mandatory labelling for (biodegradable) plastic carrier bags, with particular reference to mandatory labelling of materials;
- possible alternatives to the use of plastic carrier bags;
- introduction of targeted measures for the avoidance of plastic carrier bags;
- possibility of measures against the distribution of plastic carrier bags free of charge.