

Tesco's 'green' bags are WORSE for the environment

By [David Derbyshire](#) Last updated at 8:23 AM on 12th March 2010



Research: Tesco bags don't fully degrade

The 'degradable' plastic bags handed out in their millions by Tesco are more harmful than those they have replaced, a Government study has found.

The carrier bags, which are designed to break down within three years, leave behind tiny plastic particles that could harm birds, insects and mammals.

The report also warned the bags can litter the countryside for up to five years before they degrade, far longer than the supermarket claims.

This is because they need to be exposed to heat and sunlight for them to break down.

And unlike ordinary bags, they cannot be composted or recycled.

The report will be a major blow to Tesco, which hands out around 500million of the '100 per cent degradable' bags a year.

In fact the carriers are 'oxodegradable', which means they break down into a fine dust after coming into prolonged contact with sunlight or heat.

Conventional bags do fully disintegrate, but the process takes hundreds of years.

Oxodegradable bags contain additives that speed up the chemical breakdown of plastic.

They are different from biodegradable bags made from corn starch, which are broken down by bacteria in compost heaps.

Yesterday Environment Minister Dan Morris said: 'Consumers risk being confused by some claims made about oxodegradable plastics.'

'As these plastics cannot be composted, the term "biodegradable" can cause confusion.'

'Incorrect disposal of oxodegradable plastics has the potential to negatively affect both recycling and composting facilities.'

He added: 'We hope this research will discourage manufacturers and retailers from claiming that these materials are better for the environment than conventional plastics.'



The Daily Mail's Banish the Bags campaign led to a cut in the number of single-use carrier bags handed out by retailers

The report follows the Daily Mail's successful Banish the Bag campaign, which led to a cut in the number of wasteful single-use carrier bags handed out by retailers. However some 5.5 billion are still handed out each year.

The latest report, from Loughborough University, pulled together all the published research into degradable bags to conclude that bags like the ones Tesco are using could do more harm than good.

Degradable plastic can take five years to break down and does not meet Europe's composting standards, it said.

The bags may even stay intact if they are buried in landfill away from heat and light, the report said.

And if the bag does break down, the tiny fragments of plastic might also do harm to the environment, it added.

'Although these are regarded as beneficial by the producers, concerns have been raised that these particles of plastic may be ingested by invertebrates, birds, animals or fish,' the report said.

No evidence was found that these fragments cause harm, 'but neither was there evidence that they do not', the authors added.

Tesco claims its bags break down within 20 to 36 months, leaving nothing harmful behind.

A spokesman for Tesco said: 'We welcome this report as a contribution to the debate on bags.

'Tesco has pushed hard to reduce the environmental impact of carrier bags and as the science evolves we'll study the new findings.'