businesscompanion
trading standards law explained

Single-use carrier bags

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In this guide, the words 'must' or 'must not' are used where there is a legal requirement to do (or not do) something. The word 'should' is used where there is established legal guidance or best practice that is likely to help you avoid breaking the law.

This guidance is for England

Under the Single Use Carrier Bags Charges (England) Order 2015, all sellers are required to charge a minimum of 10p for every new single-use carrier bag they supply, although there are exemptions.

Similar charges exist in other parts of the United Kingdom, but the legislation differs slightly between countries. Businesses that supply goods in single-use carrier bags to other parts of the UK should familiarise themselves with the applicable regional legislation to avoid non-compliance**.**

Who does the legislation apply to?

The Order only applies to goods sold (and put into bags) in England. The Order applies to all sellers that supply new single-use carrier bags at a place in England in order to allow goods sold to be taken away. It also applies to sellers that supply single-use carrier bags in England with the purpose of enabling goods sold to be delivered to any person in England.

Single-use carrier bag: definition

All types of new single-use carrier bag made of lightweight plastic material (less than 70 microns), with handles, must be subject to a minimum charge of 10p (including VAT) when supplied new for the first time to carry goods, as described above.

Failing to charge for single-use carrier bags in accordance with the Order without reasonable cause may constitute a breach of this Order.

Sellers can choose to charge more than 10p per bag; this is the minimum charge. It is a commercial decision for the retailer whether or not they wish to charge for bags that would otherwise be exempt from the minimum charge.

Customers should be aware that they are under no obligation to buy bags from the retailer; they can of course bring their own bags to reuse or decline bags for delivery.

Exemptions

The supply of certain single-use carrier bags are exempt from the minimum charge:

- **Unwrapped food bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain wholly or partly unwrapped food for human or animal consumption
- **Unwrapped loose seeds bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain wholly or partly unwrapped loose seeds, bulbs, corns, rhizomes, flowers or goods contaminated by soil
- **Unwrapped blades bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain wholly or partly unwrapped axes, knives, knife blades or razor blades
- **Prescription-only medicine bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain a prescription-only medicine, a pharmacy medicine or a listed appliance sold in accordance with a prescription
- **Uncooked meat food bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain uncooked:
    - Fish / fish products
    - Meat / meat products
    - Poultry / poultry products
- **Live aquatic creatures bag.** A bag intended to be used solely to contain live aquatic creatures in water
- **Returnable multiple reuse bag (often called a 'bag for life').** A bag that all of the following apply to:
    - Sold for 10p or more
    - Intended to be returnable to the seller from which it was purchased to be replaced free of charge
    - Made from material with a thickness of between 50 and 70 microns
    - Has a width and height both greater than 404 mm, and either the width or the height greater than 439 mm (disregarding the width of any gussets, or the height of any handles extending above the main body of the bag)
- **Woven plastic bag.** A bag constructed from material that is made by interlacing long threads passing in one direction with others at a right angle to them
- **Transit goods bag.** A bag that is intended to be used to carry goods in a 'transit place' - for example, on board a ship, train, aircraft, coach or bus
- **Sealed transit bag.** A bag that is intended to be used to carry alcohol or tobacco, and is sealed after the item is placed in it in a 'restricted area' under aviation legislation (the bags used to carry 'duty free' purchases in airports)
- **Single-use carrier bags** that would otherwise be subject to the minimum charge but have been re-used - for example, by a charity shop

Record keeping

The record-keeping requirements of the Order only relate to sellers that have 250 or more contracted employees at the start of the reporting year. This figure is based on the number of full-time equivalent employees a seller has, calculated as follows: TH/37.5, where TH is the total number of hours per week for which all the employees of the business are contracted to work.

Sellers are required to keep accurate records of the number of single-use carrier bags that they supply in each reporting year (the reporting year runs from 7 April to 6 April the following year).

These records must include the following:

- Number of single-use carrier bags supplied during the reporting year
- Gross (total) proceeds of the charge. This figure is on the basis of the 10p minimum charge and is calculated at 10p multiplied by the number of chargeable bags supplied
- Amount of any VAT received by way of the gross proceeds of the charge
- Amount of any reasonable costs
- Apportionment between any different kinds of reasonable costs
- Net (final amount after deductions) proceeds of the charge. This represents the final amount left after the seller has deducted their 'reasonable costs' of complying with the legislation and any VAT
- Uses to which the net proceeds have been put. It is expected that all proceeds will be donated to good causes

'Reasonable costs' include costs reasonably incurred by the seller to comply with this legislation and to communicate information about the charge to customers; it might include, for example, obtaining legal advice, staff training and providing customer notices about the charge.

The seller must keep the aforementioned records for a period of three years beginning 31 May in the reporting year following that to which the record relates, and must supply a copy to the Government, which will, in turn, publish these records. The records must be submitted via the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Sellers must make their records available during the three-year period. They can be requested in writing by any person, and written requests must be satisfied within 28 days of receipt.

Businesses that have fewer than 250 contracted employees at the start of the reporting year must still charge for bags in England, but they are not required to keep records.

Further information

Businesses seeking further information should contact their local authority. The Order will normally be administered by officers of the Trading Standards service.

Guidance from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on retailers' responsibilities is available on the GOV.UK website.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see'Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: April 2026

Key legislation

- Single Use Carrier Bags Charges (England) Order 2015

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links go to the legislation.gov.uk website. The site usually updates the legislation to include any amendments made to it. However, this is not always the case. Information on all changes made to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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