

Supermarkets accused of using more plastic bags

By Amol Rajan

Environmental campaigners have attacked Asda and Sainsbury's for failing to reduce the number of plastic bags they use when delivering food to customers who buy online.

Despite constant pressure from consumers and the green lobby, new research suggests that both supermarket chains often use more plastic bags in their home deliveries than most of their rivals. A survey by trade magazine *The Grocer* found that on one occasion Asda used 15 bags to pack just 32 items. Other supermarkets such as Tesco emerged from the survey with much more environmentally friendly statistics ...

Pressure groups nevertheless reacted angrily to the findings. Peter Robinson, director of Waste Watch, an independent charity, highlighted the particular difficulties associated with online shopping. "When customers are actually in a supermarket they have a much greater degree of control over the amount of plastic they take home with them," he said. "But with online shopping the consumer loses that control. All the evidence suggests that when consumers are given a choice they increasingly reject unnecessary packaging."

Vicki Hird, at Friends of the Earth, said "It is ridiculous that only two or three items should be put into one bag. It's a totally unnecessary waste of resources. We need much more pressure from governments on supermarkets, including fiscal pressure."

Campaign groups are emphasising the importance of re-using and returning bags. "Customers can give their plastic carrier bags back to the driver who will take them back to the store for re-cycling.", said Peter Robinson.

On average, British consumers use 290 plastic bags a year, close to one a day. The nine major supermarket chains distribute more than 17.5 billion bags a year.

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