

Small retailers should find it easy to manage Wales's carrier bag charge when it comes into force in October, following an announcement today by Environment Minister, John Griffiths.

As of 1st October, shoppers in Wales will have to pay a minimum of 5p for every carrier bag they are given, in an effort to dramatically cut down on the excessive number of bags given out each year.

The charge will also mean that retailers in Wales will be obliged to keep a record of the number of bags they issue and account for how proceeds from the carrier charge are used.

However the Welsh Government has always said it would review the record keeping requirements for small retailers. Following feedback from the Federation of Small Businesses and other organisations representing the business sector, the Environment Minister has decided that retailers with a headcount of less than 10 would have limited administrative resource and therefore should be exempt from record keeping around the charge.

Speaking about his decision, the Environment Minister said:

"Last year in Wales we took home on average 273 carrier bags per household from the major supermarkets alone, and this figure does not even account for the number of bags we pick up when shopping on the high street or at smaller stores.

"Most of these bags are completely unnecessary. They end up cluttering up our cupboards, littering our country or sitting in landfill sites where they take between 500 and 1000 years to degrade.

"The carrier bag charge is all about helping us to cut down on the number of carrier bags we use. It is a policy that has been welcomed by people across Wales and really is good news for our country

"I have listened to the views of the Federation of Small Businesses and other representatives of the business sector, and am pleased to announce that whilst all retailers will have to charge for bags from 1st October, those with a headcount of less than 10 will be exempt from having to keep records around carrier bag use."

Janet Jones, Chair of the Federation of Small Businesses in Wales, said:

"We are pleased that the Minister has listened to our concerns regarding the practical implication of this for micro businesses. The complexity, as well as the added time and cost, in administering this would add further pressure on small businesses which have already been struggling to cope with the ongoing effects of a recession, high fuel costs and a VAT increase. We hope that the enforcement of this will also be lenient to allow time for the new charge to embed, not only with retailers, but also with their customers."

The Environment Minister stressed that he hoped people across Wales would be able to avoid the carrier bag charge altogether. He said:

"The idea of the charge is not to make people pay for carrier bags. Rather it is to encourage shoppers to make use of the bags they already have.

"We can all avoid the charge by remembering to carry reusable bags when we do our shopping."

"We know that reducing our use of carrier bags is not going to solve all our environmental problems, but the charge does deliver an important message about the need for us to live much more sustainable lives."

The level of the carrier bag charge has been set at 5p because the Welsh Government believes this is high enough to encourage people to change their shopping habits but not so high that it will deter impulse shopping or place a significant burden on shoppers who have

forgotten their reusable bags.