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China announces plastic bag ban

The Chinese government says it is banning shops from handing out free plastic bags from June this year, in a bid to curb pollution.

Production of ultra-thin plastic bags will also be banned, the State Council said in a statement.

Instead, people will be encouraged to use baskets or reusable cloth bags for their shopping, the council said.

The move comes amid growing concern about pollution and environmental degradation in China.

China was using huge quantities of plastic bags each year, the State Council, China's cabinet, said in its directive, posted on the main government website.

"Plastic shopping bags, due to reasons such as excessive use and inefficient recycling, have caused serious energy and resources waste and environment pollution," it said.

Easily discarded

Of particular concern were cheap, flimsy bags that many shopkeepers routinely handed out to customers.

"The super-thin bags have especially become a main source of plastic pollution as they are easy to break and thus disposed of carelessly," the statement said.

Shops that violated the new rules could be fined or have their goods confiscated, it said.

The council also called for greater recycling efforts from rubbish collectors, and suggested financial authorities should consider higher taxes on the production and sale of plastic bags.

In recent years, China's rapid development has triggered concerns over pollution and use of resources.

But correspondents say that there is a growing awareness that more needs to be done to protect the environment.