

Perceptions towards New Restrictions on Polythene Usage in Sri Lanka - Case Study in Colombo City

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Increasing use of thin polythene (PE) has become a global challenge for our oceans. To address the PE nuisance, the Sri Lankan government has enforced the restrictions on the usage of PE products since September 01, 2017 (The National Environmental Act, 47 of 1980). These new restrictions have various impacts on stakeholders at different scales and this study aimed at assessing the perceptions of two key stakeholders, namely supermarkets and customers with respect to PE usage and actual behavior, two months after the restriction was announced. The study was carried out in the Colombo Municipal Council area which is the commercial capital of the country. The data were collected by means of a semi-structured questionnaire at 10 supermarkets, covering the four main supermarket chains. Ten customers from each supermarket (total n = 100), selected randomly and one executive officer from each supermarket chain at their respective headquarters (n = 4) was interviewed. Customer behavior and supermarket practices were observed at the same supermarkets watching 300 customers (n=300). Probably due to the significant media attention, 94% of the interviewed customers had heard about the new restriction although only 2% had detailed knowledge. Customer agreement with the new regulation was very high with 89% and 54% expressed that they have already changed their behavior. In addition, 39% of customers expressed that they will not have any issues finding alternative packaging materials. Also, all four supermarket chains considered under this study were in favor of the regulation. Nevertheless, observations of customer behavior in the shops showed that only 11% were using own reusable bags which showed a significant difference between their perception and actual behavior. While these days, stronger PE material is used in the shops, an actual reduction in overall PE use will need more options to increase customers' motivation for using environmentally friendly materials.

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