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We Bin 9.9 Billion Receipts 'Equivalent To Destroying Sherwood Forest' Each Year

But most paper receipts can't be recycled.



By Rachel Moss

Two of every three paper receipts are thrown away unused each year in the UK, campaigners have warned.

Of the 11 billion receipts printed, nearly 9.9 billion are wasted each year, according to the campaign group Beat the Receipt.

That is the equivalent of 53,000 trees going straight into the bin – almost all the trees in Sherwood Forest or in London's eight (count them) Royal Parks.



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Most receipts can't be recycled. The majority are made from a special paper that is thermally sensitive and the figures are essentially burned onto the surface, rather than printed. This material is almost impossible to recycle.

Around half of thermal paper receipts – usually the shiny ones - are also coated with potentially harmful substances called bisphenol A (BPA) and bisphenol B (BPS). There's also a risk BPA could contaminate other materials headed for recycling, making recycling even more difficult.

Paper receipts also directly contribute to the UK's carbon footprint. For example, data from Eaternity.org estimates around 2.5kg CO₂eq / kg of receipts is generated in carbon emissions - the equivalent of around 21km driven in a car.

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The latest research revealed that 89% of Brits have needed a receipt in the past 12 months, for returns, exchanges or expenses. A further 74% of us say we would prefer to receive all receipts digitally, see retailers do more to reduce paper receipts, and are confused about why we still use paper receipts.

While just 5% of us receive digital receipts on a daily basis, 24% of us are still receiving paper receipts and contributing to the paper waste problem.

Moreover, 90% of people say that when they do need to use paper receipts, they're usually already lost, faded or binned.

Previously blogging on HuffPost UK, Matty Cusden-Ross, CEO of Flux – the tech company behind the Beat The Receipt campaign – advised consumers to only ask retailers for a receipt when you know you'll need one.

“And, if you must have a receipt, think about digital alternatives,” he said.

“Several UK retailers are already looking at how they can use technology to come up with smarter, more efficient and more environmentally friendly options to the traditional paper receipt. Some give you the option to send your receipt via email. Others use partners to send digital receipts through your banking app.

“Educate yourself about the options available, and remember that the responsibility lies not only with the retailer, but with anyone who shops (and I'm pretty sure that's all of us).”

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