



FAQs for Shoppers



Why not just recycle plastic carryout bags?

Answer: Globally, an estimated 500 billion to one trillion petroleum-based plastic bags are used each year resulting in the use of over 12 million barrels of oil. California's Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) estimates that Californians use nearly 20 billion single-use plastic bags per year and discard over 100 hundred plastic bags per second. Further, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates that only five percent of the plastic bags in California and nationwide are currently recycled.

What is the purpose of the Plastic Bag Regulation, and when does it begin?

Answer: The fundamental goal is to reduce the use of throw-away plastic products, particularly lightweight plastic bags which are a litter problem and escape into our waterways and oceans where they are harmful to animals and may enter the food chain as they degrade into smaller and smaller – but still plastic – pieces. Paper, of course, is organic and does not present similar problems. But reducing waste means cutting down on the use of paper bags, too. That's why, beginning on January 15, 2014, the City will require all Retail Establishments to encourage their customers to shop with reusable bags.

What is a Retail Establishment, and where are Single-Use Plastic Bags allowed?

Answer: A Retail Establishment is any commercial establishment that sells perishable and nonperishable goods including, but not limited to, clothing, food and personal items directly to the Customer; and is located within or doing business within the geographical city/county limits of the City of Pittsburg (includes farmers markets). Retail Establishments do not include Public Eating Establishments (restaurants and food trucks) or Nonprofit Charitable organizations.

Which bags can be provided for customers at Retail Establishments?

Answer: Retail Establishments cannot provide Single-Use Carryout Bags, but instead must provide Reusable Bags and/or Recycled Paper Carryout Bags for a cost to their customers.

What is a Single-Use Carryout Bag?

Answer: A Single-Use Carryout Bag is a bag other than a Reusable Bag provided at the check stand, cash register, point of sale or other point of departure for the purpose of transporting food or merchandise out of the establishment.

What is a Reusable Bag?

Answer: A Reusable Bag is a bag with handles that is specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse and meets all of the following requirements: has a minimum lifetime of 125 uses (uses being the capability of carrying a minimum of 22 pounds 125 times over a distance of at least 175 feet), is machine washable or capable of being cleaned and disinfected, does not contain lead, cadmium, or any other heavy metal in toxic amounts, and if made of plastic, is a minimum of at least 2.25 mils thick.

What is a Recycled Paper Carryout Bag?

Answer: A Recycled Paper Carryout Bag is a paper bag that meets all of the following requirements: (1) contains no old growth fiber, (2) is one hundred percent (100%) recyclable overall and contains a minimum of forty percent (40%) Postconsumer Recycled Material; (3) is accepted for recycling in curbside programs in the City of Pittsburg; (4) displays the word "Recyclable" in a highly visible manner on the

outside of the bag; and (5) and displays the percentage of Postconsumer Recycled Material used.

Where will I be charged for Recyclable Paper Carryout Bags and Reusable Bags?

Answer: Any Retail Establishment that provides a Recycled Paper Carryout Bag or Reusable Bag to a Customer must charge the Customer a minimum of 10 cents (\$0.10) for each bag provided. One year after the Regulation is effective a Retail Establishment must increase the price of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags to a minimum of fifteen cents (\$0.15), and two years after the ordinance is effective a Retail Establishment must increase the price of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags to a minimum of twenty-five cents (\$0.25). The minimum charge must be collected, as it is meant to be a reminder to customers to shop with reusable bags. Reusable Bags can be given to customers without charge only during limited-time store promotions.

How does the retail establishment use the money made from Recycled Paper Carryout Bags and Reusable Bags?

Answer: All monies collected by a Retail Establishment under this ordinance will be retained by the Retail Establishment and may be used for funding Reusable Bag giveaways during limited-time store promotions, costs associated with complying with the requirements of the Plastic Bag Regulation, actual costs of providing Recycled Paper Carryout Bags, or costs associated with a Retail Establishment's educational materials or education campaign encouraging the use of Reusable Bags, if any.

Will the purchase of a Recycled Paper Carryout Bags show up on customer receipts?

Answer: Yes. All Retail Establishments must indicate on the Customer receipt the number of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags provided and the total amount charged for the bags.

What about bags for vegetables and meat in stores and other plastic bags like newspaper and dry-cleaning bags? Are they also banned?

Answer: No. Retail Establishments may use handle-less Single-Use Plastic Carryout Bags and/or handle-less small paper bags when packaging product like meat, prescription medications, produce, and items that may contaminate or come in contact with other products in the customer's cart (examples include small paper bag for greeting cards, paper bags to protect bottles, plastic bags around ice cream or other wet items, paper bags used to weigh candy, etc.).

Where can I get reusable shopping bags?

Answer: In Pittsburg, Retail Establishments will be required to provide Recyclable Paper Carryout Bags and Reusable Bags for sale. Any Retail Establishment that provides a Recycled Paper Carryout Bag or Reusable Bag to a Customer must charge the Customer a minimum of 10 cents (\$0.10) for each bag provided. One year after the Regulation is effective a Retail Establishment must increase the price of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags to a minimum of fifteen cents (\$0.15), and two years after the ordinance is effective a Retail Establishment must increase the price of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags to a minimum of twenty-five cents (\$0.25). The minimum charge must be collected, as it is meant to be a reminder to customers to shop with reusable bags. Reusable Bags can be given to customers without charge only during limited-time store promotions.

Outside of Pittsburg, most grocery and drug stores already sell reusable bags for about a dollar or less. Let the charge for paper bags be a reminder to shop with your reusable bags and you'll save money in the long run.

Do customers that remember to bring their Reusable Bags get rewarded?

Answer: Potentially, yes! Retail Establishments are encouraged to provide a minimum credit of five

cents (\$0.05) for each Reusable Bag brought by a Customers to the Retail Establishment for use.

Can I still recycle or reuse other plastic bags?

Answer: Yes, you may bring your used Single-Use Plastic Bags to any Retail Establishment for use instead of purchasing a bag. Also, you may still get newspaper and dry-cleaning bags and plastic bags used for packaging new electronic products. All plastic bags can be recycled. Bundle them in one bag, tie it shut, and put it in your recycling cart. Do not recycle vegetable bags from the grocery store or any others, such as ziplock bags, used for food without rinsing and drying them first. Food residue and moisture makes them unrecyclable.

What should I do with the paper shopping bags I get?

Answer: Reuse them a few times if you can, donate clean ones to your neighborhood food bank or recycle them. Paper bags with food or grease on them cannot be recycled and must be placed in your trash bin.

When recycled, what are paper and plastic bags used for?

Answer: Recycled brown (kraft) paper bags sorted from the stream of recyclables are often made into cardboard. Some bags pass through and end up in the bales of mixed paper which is commonly made into the middle layer of corrugated cardboard, newsprint, or paperboard, typically the gray paper liner in cereal and cracker boxes.

Some of the plastic film, including plastic bags, is made into plastic lumber or wood-plastic composite lumber (commonly used for decking), pipe, garden edging, or shipping corner boards. Other plastic film is shipped to Asia where it is made into a number of consumer products, component parts or black plastic bags.

What about plastic bags for pet waste and garbage bin liners?

Answer: Pet ownership comes with responsibility and costs, including being able to provide for clean up after one's pet. There are several products available, including small bags or mitts, for cleaning up after your pet. Using Single-Use Plastic Bags for garbage bin liners is a great idea, but not everyone uses them for household garbage. The reality is that the banned plastic bags were manufactured for the purpose of carrying waste out of a store and then being disposed of. Instead of using these bags, there are many options for garbage bags on the market, even down to the roughly 3 gallon size of a plastic grocery bag. There are even biodegradable garbage bag options available for those willing to take an extra step for environmental stewardship.

What are Retail Establishments doing to help customers catch on to this Plastic Bag Regulation?

Answer: Each Retail Establishment is strongly encouraged to educate its staff to promote Reusable Bags, and to post signs encouraging Customers to use Reusable Bags as well as reusable produce bags

Aren't the non-woven polypropylene bags sold as reusable bags by many retailers as much of a problem as the lightweight throwaway bags they're replacing?

Answer: No. Once these bags have been reused a couple dozen times their impact is less than that of the many more lightweight plastic bags they've replaced. They carry from two to three times as much as typical throwaway plastic bags which often need to be doubled for strength. That's not a problem for the reusable bags. They are also recyclable. Pittsburg accepts these types of bags and other polypropylene products in curbside recycling bins and hopes people will recycle them. The value of recycled polypropylene is increasing.