



FAQs for Retailers



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

Answer: The goal is to reduce the use of throw-away plastic products, particularly lightweight single-use carryout plastic bags. They are a litter problem, and escape into waterways where they harm animals as they degrade into smaller plastic pieces and enter the food chain. Paper is organic and does not present these problems. 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 which entities are exempt from the Plastic Bag Regulation?

Answer: A Retail Establishment is any commercial establishment that sells goods directly to the Customer; and is located within or doing business within the Pittsburg City limits (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 Plastic Bags, but instead can provide Recycled Paper Carryout Bags and/or Reusable Bags for a cost to their customers.

What is a Single-Use Carryout Plastic Bag?

Answer: A Single-Use Carryout Plastic 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 specifically designed for multiple reuses and the capacity for a long lifespan.

What is a Recycled Paper Carryout Bag?

Answer: A Recycled Paper Carryout Bag is a paper bag that is 100% recyclable overall and contains a minimum of 40% Postconsumer Recycled Material. These bags are accepted for recycling in curbside programs in the City of Pittsburg, and usually display the word "Recyclable" and the percentage of Postconsumer Recycled Material used on the outside of the bag.

Will retailers just "eat the cost" of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags or Reusable Bags and not charge their customers?

Answer: No. Retail Establishments must charge the Customer a minimum of 10 cents for each Reusable or Recycled Paper Carryout 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, and two years after the ordinance is effective the price of Recycled Paper Carryout Bags must be a minimum of twenty-five cents. The minimum charge must be collected. 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 money 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 ordinance, 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.

Are Retail Establishments required to keep track of the amount money made through the sale of Recyclable Paper Carryout Bags?

Answer: Yes. All Retail Establishments must report on an annual basis, the total number of Recycled Paper Carryout and Reusable Bags provided, the total amount of money collected for providing Recycled Paper Carryout Bags, and a summary of any efforts a Retail Establishment has undertaken to promote the use of reusable bags by Customers in the prior year.

What can retailers do to help encourage customers to bring their bags?

Answer: Retail Establishments may provide a minimum credit of five cents (\$0.05) for each Reusable Bag brought by a customer for use. 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.

Are there any instances when Single-Use Carryout Bags may be used in Retail Establishments?

Answer: Yes. Retail Establishments may use Single-Use Plastic Carryout Bags and/or small paper bags when buying products like meat, prescription medications, produce, and items that may spill in the 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.). Also, newspaper and dry-cleaning bags and plastic bags used for packaging new electronic products are exempt.

Is anyone exempt from this Plastic Bag Regulation?

Answer: Yes. Any Customer participating in The California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, The State Department of Social Services Food Stamp program, or other government-subsidized purchase programs for low-income residents may receive free Recycled Paper Carryout Bags or Reusable Bags from the Retail Establishment.

Are there any restrictions on customers reusing Single-Use Plastic Bags?

Answer: No. Customers who re-use bags should benefit from their re-use efforts. The ordinance does not prohibit Customers from using bags of any type that they bring to the Retail Establishment themselves, or from carrying away goods without a bag instead of using bags provided by the store.

What should retailers do if they have large stocks of plastic bags that will last beyond the effective date of the ban?

Answer: Chain stores with outlets outside of Pittsburg can ship their bag inventory to those outlets. Smaller stores may use up their stock until January 15, 2014, then consider donating their remaining stock to non-profit reuse stores or restaurants. If your store has been collecting used plastic bags, they cannot be given to customers for reuse, but instead must be recycled.

What is the penalty for Retail Establishments that violate the Plastic Bag Regulation?

Answer: Violation of the Plastic Bag Regulation is considered a Public Nuisance. If a violation has occurred, a written citation to the Operator of a Retail Establishment will be written. Any Retail Establishment that violates or fails to comply after a written citation has been issued shall be guilty of an infraction. If a Retail Establishment has similar subsequent violations, penalties shall be imposed. Any

Retail Establishment Operator who receives a written citation or is assessed a fine may file a citation of appeal no later than 30 days after receipt of a written citation or fine.

What is the City's plan for helping Retail Establishments promote the ordinance?

Answer: All Retail Establishments were noticed of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, followed by reminder letters. Once the Regulation is in place, Retail Establishments will receive promotional materials like pins, signs, and decals as requested. The Plastic Bag Regulation will also be advertised in the newspaper, ENews, and on the City's electronic sign board.