



FAQs for Shoppers



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 where are Single-Use Carryout Plastic Bags allowed?

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.

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

Answer: Retail Establishments must charge the Customer a minimum of ten 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. 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 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.

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. Customers 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, you may still get newspaper and dry-cleaning bags and plastic bags used for packaging new electronic products.

Where can I get reusable shopping bags?

Answer: Retail Establishments throughout Pittsburg and surround the City already sell Reusable Bags, generally near the checkout area for about one dollar or less.

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. Simply 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.

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

Answer: Recycled brown (kraft) paper bags are often made into cardboard. Some bags end up in the bales of mixed paper which is commonly made into the middle layer of corrugated cardboard, newsprint, or paperboard, or the gray paper liner in cereal and cracker boxes. Some of the plastic bags are made into plastic lumber or wood-plastic composite lumber (commonly used for decking), pipe, garden edging, or shipping corner boards.

What about using 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, mitts, or even vegetable bags for cleaning up after your pet. There are many options for garbage bags on the market, including biodegradable garbage bags 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.