



City of Los Angeles Proposed Reusable Bag Policy Frequently Asked Questions

Background

What is the proposed Reusable Bag policy?

The City of Los Angeles is proposing a Reusable Bag Policy that will no longer allow the distribution of single-use plastic and paper shopping bags in supermarkets and specific types of retail stores. Residents will instead have the opportunity to personally move the City toward zero waste by using reusable bags for grocery shopping needs.

Why is the City proposing to prohibit the distribution of single-use plastic and paper shopping bags?

The most compelling reasons are waste, cost, pollution reduction, and conserving resources for future generations. Each year more than \$300 million is paid by government agencies in California to pickup and dispose of litter discarded in our City's neighborhoods.¹ The enormous cost of litter disposal is a significant and unnecessary waste of limited taxpayer dollars as well as plastic and paper resources that can be recycled. Making matters worse is the harm plastic and paper pollution has on our environment over many years. The Proposed Reusable Bag Policy is a good step forward to help protect our quality of life and our future.

When will the proposed policy begin?

If the Mayor and City Council adopt the Reusable Bag Policy Proposal, its effective date will be established at a later time.

For Residents

How will this proposed policy affect me?

Supermarkets and specific types of retail stores will no longer provide single-use plastic and paper bags to shoppers. Customers can bring their own reusable bags, or buy reusable bags that will be available for sale at the point of purchase. Shoppers participating in the California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Food Program will receive a free reusable bag at the point of sale.

Are single-use paper and plastics bags really that harmful to the environment?

Plastic bags in the environment are known to separate into microscopic particles that enter our food

¹ California State Assembly, AB 1466, ftp://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_1451-1500/ab_1466_cfa_20040109_113151_asm_comm.html

chain². How? Plastic debris in the ocean is eaten by plankton, fish, and other marine life which in turn are consumed by people^{3,4}.

Paper bags have a greater impact on the environment because they require natural resources (trees, water, fuel) to manufacture and transport and they generate more greenhouse gas emissions as compared to other single-use bags⁵.

Why not encourage people to recycle single-use plastic and paper bags instead?

Only 5% of the 2.3 billion plastic bags that are used in the City each year are recycled⁶ and only 21% of the 400 million paper bags produced are actually recycled⁷ despite citywide recycling program efforts, and concerns over environmental health. Unfortunately, while some single-use plastic and paper shopping bags are being recycled, the majority go into landfills or end up in our environment as litter.

Why are reusable bags better for the environment?

Each American could potentially reduce the number of single-use plastic and paper shopping bags they use by 500 bags per year by switching to reusable bags⁸. If the 4 million residents in the City used reusable bags, 2 billion single-use plastic and paper bags would no longer have a negative impact on the environment and our quality of life. Reusable bags reduce the amount of plastic and paper bags that end up in our landfills and in our environment because they can be used over and over again. Reusable bags also demand fewer resources and create less greenhouse gas emissions.

What if I can't afford to purchase a reusable bag?

Customers participating in the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) will be provided free reusable bags from retailers having to comply with this new policy.

Isn't it hard to remember to bring your own reusable bag every time you go shopping?

Here are some tips to remember to bring your own reusable bag:

Keep your reusable bags in the front seat of your car or at the front door, not in the trunk of a car or in a closet where they are forgotten.

After you empty and wash your bags, place them by your door, in your car, or near your keys.

If you forget to bring in your reusable bags, go back to your car and get them. Or you can keep the items in your cart and transfer them to your reusable bags when you get to your car.

Write a note to "Bring your own bag" on your shopping list.

Some supermarkets have already started to promote the use of reusable bags and sell them

² ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/studies/pdf/plastics.pdf

³ <http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/plasticdet.html>

⁴ Possatto et al., "Plastic debris ingestion by marine catfish: An unexpected fisheries impact," 2011.

⁵ The ULS Report, "Review of Life Cycle Data Relating to Disposable, Compostable, Biodegradable, and Reusable Grocery Bags," March 28, 2008.

⁶ Recycling based on 2011 Bureau of Sanitation estimates. Total generation based on Los Angeles County "An Overview of Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County: A Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors." August 2007.

⁷ HDR Engineering, Policy Tools for Reducing Impact of Single-Use, Carryout Plastic Bags and EPS Food Packaging, June 2, 2008.

⁸ American Plastic Manufacturing, <http://www.apmbags.com/bagmyths>

at a reasonable price. Others have posted reminders in their parking lots and in front of their stores.

How do I care for my reusable bag?

The best reusable bags are those that are machine washable so they can be cleaned properly to prevent germs. Wash them as often as necessary, or as often as you would wash towels. Many people choose to designate different styles of bags for different types of products; such as separate bags for animal products, produce, and dry goods. Some reusable bags cannot be placed in the washing machine, so check the manufacturer's disinfecting and cleaning instructions.

Where can I find a reusable bag?

The City is considering requiring all retailers to offer reusable bags at the point of sale for a cost or for free. Since 2005, the City has purchased and distributed over 250,000 reusable bags to retailers, nonprofit groups, and neighborhood council groups. For information on upcoming events, please visit www.zerowaste.lacity.org.

For Retailers

How will this proposed policy affect supermarkets and retail stores?

The proposed policy would prohibit supermarkets and retail stores from distributing single-use plastic and paper shopping bags to customers and instead, have reusable bags available for their customers, either for a cost or for free.

What stores would be required to follow this proposed policy?

The proposed policy applies to the following retail stores:

Supermarket – A full-line, self-service retail store with gross annual sales of \$2,000,000 or more, that sells a line of dry grocery; canned goods; or nonfood items and some perishable items.

Large Retail Store with a Pharmacy - At least 10,000 ft² of retail space that generates sales or use tax pursuant to the Bradley-Burns Uniform Local Sales and Use Tax Law (Part 1.5 (commencing with Section 7200) of Division 2 of the Revenue and Taxation Code) and that has a pharmacy licensed pursuant to Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 4000) of Division 2 of the Business and Professions Code.

Grocery store, Convenience store, or Foodmart – A store that sells a limited line of goods that includes milk, bread, soda, and snack foods, including those stores with a Type 20 or 21 license issued by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

Pharmacy - Pharmacy licensed pursuant to Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 4000) of Division 2 of the Business and Professions Code.

Would any retailers be exempt from the proposed policy?

Restaurants, coffee shops, and fast food restaurants are exempt from the proposed policy due to sanitary and health concerns.

What kind of bags would be prohibited under this proposed policy, if adopted?

Single-use plastic carryout bags made predominantly of plastic that is derived from either petroleum or a biologically-based source, such as corn or other plant sources, which are provided to a customer at the point of sale.

Single-use paper bags made of paper materials that include, but are not limited to, virgin, recycled or recyclable paper materials, which are provided to a customer at the point of sale.

Protective plastic bags without handles, for items such as meat and produce, are NOT prohibited in this proposed policy.

Where can I get more updates on the policy?

For more information, visit www.zerowaste.lacity.org.

