

Frequently Asked Questions:

City of Los Angeles' Proposed Single-Use Bag Ordinance

What policy is being considered?

The City of Los Angeles is proposing to adopt and implement an ordinance to ban the use of single-use plastic carryout bags. The ordinance would also charge a fee on paper bags and promote the use of reusable bags at certain retailers within the City.

Although not finalized, the proposed ban would apply to bags provided at checkout at stores including supermarkets, grocery stores, drug stores, convenience stores and businesses with a limited line of groceries (like pharmacies).

Why ban plastic bags?

Plastic bag litter harms our environment

Billions of plastic bags are used in Los Angeles.¹ Plastic bag litter blights our communities and harms the environment. Plastic bags, designed only to be used for minutes, never biodegrade. Although plastic bags can break down into smaller pieces, they remain in the environment and accumulate in streams, lakes, and the ocean. As a result, it poses a persistent threat to wildlife. A 2012 study by the Convention on Biological Diversity found that 663 marine species have been impacted by marine plastic litter through entanglement and ingestion.²

Plastic bags cost our economy

According to the CalRecycle website, California spends an estimated \$25 million a year to collect and landfill discarded plastic bags.³ This is money that could otherwise be spent on vital public services. A 2012 report by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found California's coastal cities and counties spend about \$420 million each year to combat litter and curtail marine debris.⁴ Single-use plastic bags have been a large contributor to trash pollution on our beaches and inland creeks. For example, volunteers participating in the 2011 International Coastal Cleanup in California recovered 64,085 plastic bags during the one day event.⁵

Does the proposed policy ban all plastic bags?

No. The policy being considered only applies to bags used at point of sale. Bags used to transport produce, bulk items, raw meat, or other items to the checkout would still be available.

Why regulate paper bags?

Paper bags are NOT sustainable. The policy addresses both paper and plastic bags in order to encourage use of reusable bags (or no bags!) and prevent consumers from switching from one environmentally-harmful product to another. Although paper bags arguably pose less risk to the aquatic environment, the manufacturing of virgin paper emits greenhouse gases and uses toxic substances in pulping process, which include caustic sodas, sodium hydroxide, sodium sulfide, and chlorine compounds.⁶

¹ City of Los Angeles. Dept. of Public Works, Bureau of Sanitation. *Initial Study: Single-Use Plastic Carryout Bag Ordinance*. Sept. 2012: 1. Print.

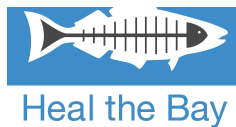
² <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-67-en.pdf>

³ <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm>.

⁴ <http://www.epa.gov/region9/marine-debris/pdf/WestCoastCommsCost-MngMarineDebris.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.oceanconservancy.org/our-work/marine-debris/2012-icc-data-pdf.pdf>

⁶ Green Cities California, *Master Environmental Impact Assessment on Single-Use and Reusable Bags*. Mar. 2010: 18. Print.



Why not just increase recycling of plastic bags?

We cannot recycle our way out of this problem

Despite active efforts to expand recycling programs, the statewide recycling rate of single-use plastic bags remains around 5 percent.⁷ The majority of single-use plastic bags – even if reused once or twice by consumers – end up in our landfills or as part of the litter stream, polluting our inland and coastal communities.

Plastic bags are very costly and difficult to recycle

Plastic bags easily damage recycling equipment and jam screens used to separate materials. The City of San Jose reports that it costs them \$1 million per year to repair their recycling equipment from jammed plastic bags.⁸

I thought the ordinance was already final. Why is there another vote?

In May 2012, the Los Angeles City Council voted to draft an ordinance that would ban single-use plastic bags and place a charge on paper bags at grocery stores and select other retailers. The City has been working to prepare the appropriate environmental reports under the California Environmental Quality Act and draft the language of the ordinance. **The City Council will hopefully take up the issue in May 2013.**

74 cities and counties in California are covered by a single-use bag ordinance, including Los Angeles County, Glendale, Malibu, Santa Monica, Pasadena and Long Beach.

If passed, Los Angeles will be the largest city in the United States to ban plastic bags.

What can I use to pick up dog poop or for bin liners?

You can use newspaper, or newspaper cover bags, fruit and vegetable bags from the market or purchase dog waste bags. Fruit and vegetable bags can also be used as bin liners, or you can forgo bin liners entirely.

How can I remember to bring bags to the store?

- Always start your grocery list with “Bring Bags.”
- Keep a collapsible bag in your purse or briefcase for those emergency runs to the stores.
- Hang a bag on the door knob to your garage or someplace nearby. It will serve as a constant visual reminder to bring your bags with you.

What if I forget my reusable bag?

- If you have a small number of items you can carry them out by hand or put them in your purse.
- You can place your items back in your grocery cart and unload them into your trunk.
- You can purchase a reusable bag and take it to the store on future trips.

GET INVOLVED ! Visit <http://www.healthebay.org/bagban> to find out more about the ordinance and how you can get involved this spring!

⁷ California Integrated Waste Management Board, Staff Report, Agenda Item 14, June 12, 2007, Board Meeting.

⁸ City of San Jose Environmental Services Division (Available at: <http://www.sjrecycles.org/bags>).