



City of Eugene Bring Your Bag FAQ - SHOPPERS

In an effort to promote reusable shopping bags and reduce litter, the City of Eugene joins other cities — including Corvallis, Portland, San Francisco, Seattle, and Austin — in encouraging the use of reusable bags by banning single-use plastic carryout bags within city limits beginning May 1, 2013. Eugeneans use an estimated 67 million single-use plastic carryout bags each year. Single-use plastic carryout bags may offer short-term convenience, but they have long-term costs in terms of litter and impact on wildlife and the environment. As a result of the new law ([Eugene Ordinance 20498](#)), fewer unnecessary plastic carryout bags will litter Eugene neighborhoods, parks, and natural areas.

When are retailers required to stop providing single-use plastic carryout bags?

The Bring Your Bag campaign begins May 1, 2013. At this time, retailers will be required to stop providing single-use plastic carryout bags to customers. However, retailers can begin the transition at any time before May 1.

What businesses does this apply to?

All retail businesses, including grocery stores, department and clothing stores, convenience stores and local markets located within the City of Eugene will be required to provide only recycled paper bags or reusable bags as carryout bags for customers.

What about farmers' markets, street fairs, festivals, and events?

The ordinance requires compliance from any store, shop, sales outlet, or vendor located within the City of Eugene that sells goods at retail. These types of establishments fall under that definition and are required to comply.

What plastic bags are prohibited?

All single-use plastic carryout bags provided at the point of sale that are less than 4 mils thick are prohibited. Bags constructed of durable plastic (4 mils or thicker) are considered reusable and are allowed. A 'mil' is an industry term that equals one thousandth of an inch.

What types of plastic bags are allowed?

The following types of plastic bags are allowed:

- Bags used to package bulk items, such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains, candy, or small hardware items;
- Bags that contain or wrap frozen foods, meat, and fish;
- Bags that contain or wrap flowers, potted plants, or other items where dampness may be a problem;
- Bags that contain unwrapped prepared foods or bakery goods;

- Pharmacy prescription bags;
- Bags that protect fragile items, such as glassware and breakables, which are then placed in a carryout bag.

Can retailers provide paper bags?

Yes. All paper bags provided at checkout must be made of 40% recycled content and be 100% recyclable, and must be capable of composting completely. In addition, retailers must charge a minimum of five cents for each paper bag provided at the point of sale. Paper bags provided at a time other than the point of sale do not require a five cent charge.

What does the five cent charge for paper bags go toward?

The cent charge goes back to the retailer to recoup costs.

Are retailers required to provide reusable bags or recyclable paper bags at checkout?

No. Retailers may choose to provide either, both, or neither. If they provide paper bags, they must charge at least five cents for each bag. If they provide reusable plastic bags, they must be at least 4 mils thick to be considered “reusable.”

Can retailers provide plastic bags made of compostable materials?

Not if they are less than 4 mils thick.

Are any businesses exempt from the ban?

Yes. Restaurants and other establishments where the primary business is the preparation of food or drink may provide customers with single-use plastic carryout bags for hot, prepared takeout foods and liquids.

The ordinance allows a restaurant to use plastic bags for hot, prepared takeout food. If a restaurant wants to use paper bags instead, does the restaurant have to charge five cents per bag?

The intent of the ordinance was to move away from plastic bags. The goal is to use reusable bags rather than paper bags, but the even greater goal is to avoid using plastic bags. City staff will be asking the Council during a review of the ordinance later this year to clarify that a restaurant can use paper bags for hot, prepared takeout food without charging five cents per bag. Until staff are able to ask the Council to clarify the ordinance, the City will not take enforcement action against a restaurant which chooses to provide – without charge – paper bags rather than plastic bags for hot, prepared take-out food. As stated in the ordinance, paper bags must contain 40% recycled content.

If restaurants are selling items other than hot, prepared takeout foods are the bags they use still exempt?

No. If the items being purchased are not prepared hot, prepared takeout foods, then single-use plastic carryout bags less than 4 mils thick may not be used.

Are grocers’ deli counters exempt like restaurants that serve hot, prepared takeout foods?

Yes. Hot, prepared takeout foods such as roasted chicken and soups can be placed in protective plastic bags at the deli counter as needed to prevent leaks or spills.

How will the City help shoppers prepare for this?

The Bring Your Bag campaign focuses on raising awareness about reusing bags, helping residents remember their reusable bags when shopping, and connecting residents with resources to get free or reduced price bags. This campaign begins mid-March and is on-going.

Are any customers exempt from the five cent charge on paper bags?

Yes. Customers who use a voucher issued under the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program may request a paper bag at no cost at the point of sale. Only the WIC items purchased with a WIC voucher are exempt from the five cent bag charge. This exemption does not apply to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamp/Oregon Trail) participants.

Can an Electronic Benefit Transfer (SNAP or food stamp) card cover the five cent fee for paper bags?

Recently some states have begun charging customers a fee for each shopping bag (plastic and/or paper) provided by a grocery store. Other states are considering charging grocery bag fees as well. State's grocery bag fees may **not** be paid for with SNAP benefits. In addition, the Food and Nutrition Service does not have authority to exempt SNAP clients from this fee. Therefore, grocery bag fees must be paid for using cash, credit card, or non-SNAP debit. Stores that give discounts at the point-of-sale if customers bring their own bags must treat SNAP clients in the same manner.

Where can I get free or reduced price bags?

Certain stores and organization are giving away free reusable bags. To find a listing of these locations, please visit [our website](#).

What are the environmental impacts of this new ordinance?

Removing the majority of plastic bags from the retail landscape requires community members to utilize reusable bags more often. The switch from single-use bags to reusable bags has the impact of lessening the life cycle impacts of plastic bag production, a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions associated with production and transport of the bags, and less material in our local landfill, and less litter in our woods, streams, and natural areas.

What will the statewide ban do to Eugene's ban?

Currently there is no statewide ban on plastic bags. If a statewide ban goes into effect, the City will determine the best way to move forward.

How will this law be enforced?

The City of Eugene is taking an educational approach regarding this ordinance. If community members call and complain, City staff will talk to the retailer about the law and explain what is needed to comply. If it becomes clear a retailer is intentionally not complying they will be fined.

What if I notice a store is violating the ordinance?

Similar to other city rules, the plastic bag ban will be enforced on a complaint-driven basis. The City of Eugene is taking an educational approach regarding this ordinance. If community members call and complain, City staff will talk to the retailer about the law and explain what is needed to comply. If it becomes clear a retailer is intentionally not complying they will be fined. To report a violation, please fill out a [nuisance complaint form](#).

What are the penalties for businesses if they do not comply with the ordinance?

The penalties for violating the new law will be consistent with other penalties outlined in the Eugene Code. The amount of the fine is based on a number of factors, including barriers to compliance, frequency of violation, and efforts to comply; it is determined on a case-by-case basis.

What are options for typical secondary plastic bag uses?

- *Dealing with pet waste:* There will still be many plastic bags in circulation. You can continue to use bread bags, produce, bulk, or cereal bags.
- *Lining a garbage can:* Line your garbage can with newspaper and rinse it out periodically. Or buy some lightweight plastic bags and reuse them, dumping the contents into your outdoor garbage can before relining the can with them.

How can shoppers keep their reusable shopping bags clean and safe?

A 2010 study showed that 97% of shoppers have never washed their reusable bags. There are a few simple steps shoppers can follow to keep reusable bags clean and to keep themselves and their families safe from germs. Wash reusable grocery bags at least once per month:

- Cloth reusable bags should be washed in a washing machine using laundry detergent and dried in the dryer or air-dried.
- Plastic-lined reusable bags should be wiped using hot water and soap and air-dried.
- Check that both cloth and plastic-lined reusable bags are completely dry before storing them.

Always put raw meats into a disposable plastic bag before putting them in a reusable bag. When using reusable bags, keep meats, fresh produce, and ready-to-eat foods separated from other food products. Additionally, consumers should clean any reusable bags used for carrying food before using for other purposes such as carrying books or gym clothes.

How can I remember to bring my reusable bags to the store?

Here are a few useful tips:

- Always start your shopping list with "Bring Bags"
- Keep a collapsible bag in your purse, backpack, or briefcase
- Keep bags in your vehicle