



All Our Energy

People-Powered Renewable Energy, Climate Solutions, and Local Environmental Advocacy.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS/ RESPONSES ABOUT REUSABLE BAG ORDINANCES

Produced by: All Our Energy and the “BYO Bag Long Beach” Coalition and modified for Nassau County

“Why are you doing this? Why do we need to change?”

- Each resident uses an average of 7 single-use bags per week, for a total of **450 million plastic bags per year!!** Even with single stream recycling-near to ZERO PERCENT are being recycled. It is wasteful and bad for our environment, which is surrounded by oceans and bays which are already littered with plastic.
- We have a very big storm drain issue and our tax dollars are being spent to clean them out regularly.
- Single-use plastic bags are made from petroleum/oil, from dirty nonrenewable resources.

“What is the difference between a bag ban and a surcharge?”

- We are not proposing a complete BAN on bags. Bags will still be available for those who feel they need them or for those who may be unfamiliar with an ordinance. Under a surcharge ordinance, issuing plastic bags is legal at a mandatory minimum fee.

“But what about paper bags, can’t we go back to using those?”

- Although they don’t get stuck in trees, and wildlife don’t die from eating them, paper bags are just as bad for the environment. They take precious forest resources to make them, and are very energy-intensive to produce and ship.
- They also cost more - we do not want to force store owners to switch to a more expensive single-use bag option.
- In the US, about 14 million trees are cut down to make paper bags each year. - reuseit.com
- It takes about four times more energy than making plastic bags to produce paper bags. - reuseit.com
- It takes three times as much water to make a paper bag than it does to make a plastic bag. - reuseit.com

“If I don’t get free bags, what will I use to pick up my pet waste?”

- You can still buy these bags if you want to. However, we recommend bags that are specifically designed for pet waste. Pet waste bags are smaller, use less material, and take up less space under your sink and are not as bad for the environment. **BONUS:** they come free from rips and tears! You can find them online and in pet stores for as low as .008 cents per bag.
- There will still be many plastic bags in circulation. You can continue to use bread bags, produce, bulk, cereal bags etc.

“The government charges enough taxes already! Why do I have to pay even more now?”

- This is NOT A TAX it is a surcharge. You have the CHOICE to pay for it or not. It is 100% avoidable. The law is simply that stores can no longer give-away single use bags for “free.”

“Where does the money go? Why can’t it be used for the environment?”

- The money paid for each bag goes back to the merchant to cover the cost of purchasing, storing, and issuing the bag.

“I heard that reusable bags are made with toxic materials...”

- Like any other product you bring into your household, it is important to be a smart shopper and know where the product comes from and what materials are used to make it. We recommend cotton, hemp, canvas bags, or bags made of recycled material that are machine washable.

“Is using reusable bags a health risk? What about germs?”

- Like any other kitchen item; drying racks, dish rags, etc. any items that come into contact with food should be washed fairly regularly. We recommend designating one or two bags for “produce” and one or two bags for “meats and cold cuts” so you limit the amount of bags you need to wash and how often. Most other grocery store products already come pre-wrapped.

“Why can’t I just reuse or recycle my plastic bags?”

- Even if you reuse the bag once or twice, and even if you try to “recycle” it, plastic is bad for the environment because once plastic is produced, it never ever breaks down in our environment. Currently near 0% of plastic bags are recycled here. .
- Plastic bags create major problems at recycling facilities. They jam and shut down machinery, accounting for almost a third of labor costs. Plastic bags that get mixed with other recyclables also contaminate the end materials, lowering their quality and value. The impacts of plastic bags in our curbside recycling system means higher collection rates(City of Portland, OR)



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“I don’t believe people should be forced by government to do this. It should be voluntary.”

The problem is, it currently IS voluntary and that isn’t working. Under current conditions, those who bring their own bags and avoid the pollution and costs to the public waste stream are currently subsidizing those who do not. This includes at the checkout counter, the cost of garbage collection, the cost of cleaning up debris all over town, and the transport and permanent storage in landfills of materials that will never break down.

“Why can’t we just switch to “biodegradable” or plant-based plastic bags?” There are several reasons...

- By it’s nature, plastic does not actually “bio-degrade”
- Organic material bags could be used, but are not processed or treated the same way plastic bags are, so everyone would have to learn how to tell the difference and separate them (think plastic bottles and glass bottles)
- They are made to degrade in very specific conditions - it is not like users could add it to their backyard compost and expect it to breakdown and become soil
- A “biodegradable” plastic bag is a bit of a misnomer. These bags can only break down under very specific conditions and do NOT break down naturally in our waterways, posing a threat to animal life. Bags on our streets inevitably end up in our rivers and ocean, facilitated by the city’s storm drain system. To fully degrade, these bags require heat and specific bacteria present in industrial composting facilities. - healthebay.org
- The ones made from Casava (not proven to work) or other food items are a waste of food. Should a billion people be fed first, or make a bag to be used a few minutes and become waste that still could harm wildlife while it degrades?

“What will I do to line my waste baskets? Won’t this increase the amount of garbage bags being produced and sold?”

- We recommend only using liners when necessary. Most household waste-baskets don’t hold organic or toxic waste, and cans can be dumped into a larger kitchen-type bag before being taken out instead of being in multiple smaller bags, inside a larger bag. For those who still need garbage bag liners, they will still be available for purchase just like before. At this time, we are not targeting eliminating these types of bags. While still bad for the environment, they are not the type that commonly pop, schred and blow away to wind up in trees, storm drains, and our waterways.
- Line your garbage can with newspaper and rinse it out periodically. Or buy some bags and reuse them to line your can, dumping the contents into your outdoor garbage can before relining your can with them.

“Money is very tight for my family now and every dollar counts - why should I be expected to buy bags now when I could be buying milk for my kids?”

- The bags were never free. Stores have always purchased the bags and passed the cost along to consumers through the cost of their goods, just like other overhead costs. In this scenario, you would simply have the choice to continue buying single-use bags (\$.05 per bag at 7 bags per person per week equals only \$18.20 per year) or switch to re-usable bags, which you only have to buy once, if at all. Many companies give reusable bags away for free as promotional gifts.

“Aren’t there bigger things to worry about than plastic bags?”

- Yes, the world is filled with many pressing problems. But plastic bags ARE a big problem -- blighting neighborhoods, clogging storm drains to cause floods, and harming animals. They are also a powerful symbol of our throwaway culture. It is a gateway issue for us. The healthy debate about bags gets people to think about other wasteful practices in their daily lives, be it using single-use water bottles or taking a drinking straw at the corner restaurant. Little things add up to bigger things. - healthebay.org

Additional Tips:

You may already own reusable bags, but it can be a challenge to remember them when you head to the store or pharmacy. While it takes a little time to form a new habit, we offer these tips to help you to remember to bring your bags every time:

- Store bags near your house keys or near the door.
- Remember to return bags to your car after you unload.
- Write a reminder on your grocery list.
- Keep bags with items that you need. You can put them with your house keys, cell phone, wallet, etc. That way when you find yourself picking up a few items, you’ll be prepared with your own bag.
- Buy a fold-up reusable bag that can clip on to your purse or fits in your pocket.
- Have more than one reusable bag and keep them in different places. Keep one in your backpack or purse.
- Leave bags in your car. If you forget to bring them in, you can go back to the car and get them! Or- you can check out, put them back in your cart, roll that to your car and put the items in the bags there!
- Leave a “BRING YOUR BAGS” note on your door.