



Bring Your Own Bag Frequently Asked Questions - General



1. *What is the plastic bag ordinance?*

Starting January 1, 2012 all grocery, pharmacy, and retail stores will no longer be able to provide plastic carryout bags at checkout. Retailers may provide a paper bag made of 40% post-consumer recycled content for a minimum of 10 cents each upon checkout.

2. *How does the ordinance affect me as a consumer?*

Start shopping with a reusable bag now. Keep reusable bags by your door, in your car, or near your keys. Keep foldable bags in pockets, backpacks, or your purse.

3. *Why are bags being prohibited?*

Grocery stores and other retailers in the United States annually provide 38 billion single-use paper and plastic carryout bags to their customers. While many of the bags do get recycled, many more are disposed of as trash and many find their way into creeks, rivers, oceans, and highways as unsightly litter. These bags represent an unnecessary waste of resources that can easily be avoided through the use of reusable bags.

4. *Are plastic bags a problem for local creeks?*

In San José, the Guadalupe River, Coyote Creek and Silver Creek will likely be declared 'impaired by trash', and thereby in violation of the federal Clean Water Act. San José and other Bay Area cities will be required to reduce litter in waterways in order to comply with state and federal regulations. Plastic bags are one source of plastic litter with a simple alternative – a reusable bag.

5. *Why is there a charge on paper bags?*

Banning plastic bags alone has the direct effect of encouraging the use of paper bags. Paper bags are not necessarily better, they require much more energy and water to produce and require the cutting of trees to manufacture.

6. *Which stores will this affect?*

All grocery, pharmacy and retail stores, large and small, will have to comply with the ordinance.

7. *Why not just offer customers an incentive to bring their own bags?*

Most grocery stores currently offer an incentive. While admirable, these programs have not significantly reduced the number of plastic bags consumed.

8. *Why not just encourage customers to recycle their plastic bags?*

California law currently requires all large stores to provide in-store opportunities for bag recycling. However, only a small fraction of the plastic bags are recycled, many more end up in landfills.

9. *Does San José collect plastic bags for recycling at curbside?*

San José is no longer accepting plastic bags in curbside recycling. They jam sorting equipment causing costly shutdowns to machinery. Instead San José is encouraging residents to take plastic bags back to the stores for recycling.

10. *Why not require biodegradable plastic bags?*

Biodegradable plastic bags still encourage the use of disposable bags.

11. *Will I still be able to purchase plastic garbage bags?*

Yes. This ordinance will not affect the sale and purchase of plastic garbage bag liners.

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