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Plastic bags are a problem because they...

- use dwindling natural resources and create pollution during production and distribution
- create significant litter, clogged street drains and sewers, which are costly to clean up
- harm marine life and damage aquatic ecosystems
- are difficult to recycle and are not accepted in curbside recycling

In 2007 San Francisco was the first city to ban non-compostable plastic checkout bags in supermarket and pharmacy chains. The Board of Supervisors has now passed legislation to expand the non-compostable plastic bag ban.

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The new legislation...

- expands the ban* to include all retail stores starting in 10/1/2012
- expands the ban* to include all restaurants starting in 10/1/2013
- requires a 10-cent minimum charge on allowable checkout bags (charge for compostable plastic bags starts in October, 2013), with no charge required for customers taking their left-over food from a sit down dine-in restaurant
- allows stores to keep the charge for bags, which will help offset additional costs for providing acceptable bags

*Checkout bags allowed under the ordinance:

- Certified compostable plastic bags
- Paper bags with 40% post-consumer recycled content
- Reusable bags which are designed for 125 or more uses, and are washable for cleaning

**See ordinance for further criteria

The legislation does **NOT** apply to:

- Bags used for bulk items, produce, nuts, grains, candy, meat, fish, small hardware, or bags used to separate items to avoid damage
- Bags from pharmacists used to contain prescription drugs
- Newspaper bags
- Laundry or dry cleaning bags

For more information please call visit sfenvironment.org/checkout-bag-policy-faq or call SFEnvironment at (415) 355-3700



Frequently Asked Questions Checkout Bag Ordinance

What is the purpose of the legislation?

The purpose of this new law is to encourage customers to bring their own checkout bags, in order to reduce the impact to the city and the environment of disposable bags. At least 45 other cities and counties in California have similar laws. Charging customers 10 cents per provided checkout bag has been shown to reduce the number of disposable bags used, by nearly 70-90%. This reduction in bag use also saves stores in their own checkout bag purchase costs.

This legislation will also help reduce unnecessary waste, contamination in recycling and composting programs, and litter, all of which is very costly to the taxpayers of San Francisco, as well as prevent harm to marine life.

What types of businesses does the legislation apply to?

This legislation applies to all retail establishments located within the geographical limits of the City and County of San Francisco, including convenience stores. The legislation also applies to restaurants starting October 1, 2013.

Are businesses required to charge?

Yes. The minimum charge is 10 cents per checkout bag, but if a business wants to charge more for the bags they give out they can.

When does the legislation go into effect?

Stores must charge for checkout bags starting October 1st, 2012. Due to state regulations, compostable plastic bags don't carry a required charge until October 1st, 2013, however, businesses may choose to charge for compostable plastic bags before then. Restaurants are not subject to the legislation until October 1st, 2013.

How will the legislation affect the poor and elderly in San Francisco?

Stores pass the cost of bags onto their shoppers. Low-income people and seniors will be able to avoid all bag costs by bringing their own bags to the store. SF Environment will partner with grocers and local non-profit environmental groups in a public awareness campaign promoting reusable bags, including reusable bag giveaways targeting low and fixed-income San Franciscans. Customers participating in WIC or food stamp programs are exempt from the bag charge.

Where will the money be spent?

Stores keep the entire checkout bag charge in order to offset the cost of allowable bags.

How can shoppers avoid the charge?

Shoppers can avoid the charge by bringing their own bags whenever they shop, or refuse a bag when they make a small purchase that is easy to carry without a bag.

How will the fee be monitored?

The checkout bag charge must be itemized and shown separately on the customer's receipt.

What happens to businesses that don't comply?

SF Environment will focus primarily on education and helping businesses comply. For those who are persistently out of compliance, warning can be issued, and fines can range from \$100-\$500.

Where can I buy acceptable bags?

Acceptable bags come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Ordinance compliant bags are available at a variety of price points. SFE will provide lists of ordinance-compliant bag suppliers.

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