



Frequently Asked Questions Checkout Bag Ordinance

What is the purpose of the Checkout Bag Ordinance?

The purpose of this ordinance is to reduce the impact to the city and the environment of disposable bags. A 10 cent charge per checkout bag has been shown to reduce the number of disposable bags used by nearly 70-90%.

75 other communities in California are covered by similar laws. This ordinance will reduce litter and waste, as well as contamination in recycling and composting programs, reducing cost to San Francisco taxpayers. In addition, the law will improve the water quality in the Bay and the ocean by reducing pollution.

What types of businesses does the ordinance apply to?

The ordinance applies to all retail establishments in San Francisco as of October 1, 2012 and to all food establishments beginning October 1, 2013.

Are businesses required to charge?

Yes. The minimum charge is 10 cents per checkout bag. A business may charge more for checkout bags they provide.

How will the ordinance affect WIC, EBT, SNAP and other food stamp program customers?

The charge does not apply to WIC, EBT, SNAP, and food stamp program transactions.

How can shoppers avoid the charge?

Shoppers can avoid the charge by bringing their own bag or refusing a bag when they make a small purchase that is easy to carry without a bag. They can just say no to a bag.

How will the fee be monitored?

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

Where does the 10 cent charge go?

Stores and food establishments keep the entire checkout bag charge in order to help offset the cost of compliant bags.

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.

What type of bags can businesses use? Where can businesses buy compliant bags?

Compliant checkout bags include: certified compostable plastic bags that are labeled, paper bags labeled with 40% post-consumer recycled content, and reusable bags which are designed for at least 125 uses and are washable. Go to sfenvironment.org/checkoutbag for more information on compliant bags and sfenvironment.org/bagvendors for a list of bag vendors.

What use of bags does this ordinance not apply to?

The ordinance does not apply to: Bags that are used for loose bulk items such as produce, nuts, grains, or candy. Bags used to contain or wrap frozen foods, meat, or fish. Bags used for unwrapped prepared foods or bakery goods. Bags used to prevent damage to a good or contamination of other goods placed together in the same bag (such as a bag used to wrap a container to prevent leakage of hot liquids).