



Frequently Asked Questions

About the City of American Canyon Single-Use Plastic Bag Reduction Ordinance

The majority of single use plastic bags are not reused and end up in landfills, litter the landscape, pollute our river and creeks, jam recycling equipment, and only a small percentage are recycled. According to Californians Against Waste, cities and counties that have instituted a single-use plastic bag ban (which includes a charge for paper bags) have seen single-use plastic bag use decrease by 95%, paper bag use decrease by 30%, and plastic litter in waterways decrease by 60%.

Below are some frequently asked questions (FAQ) and answers about single-use plastic bags and why reducing or eliminating their use is beneficial to our community.

What is the purpose of American Canyon's Single-Use Bag Reduction Ordinance?

The intent of the Single-use Bag Reduction Ordinance is to significantly reduce the use of single-use plastic bags so there is less plastic waste in the environment and our landfills.

What does the ordinance cover?

Under this ordinance, use of single-use plastic bags (although there are some exceptions outlined in this FAQ) would no longer be permitted at retail stores. Paper bags and reusable plastic bags will be allowed, but retailers will be required to charge customers not less than 10 cents per bag to encourage customers to use reusable bags. The 10 cents is not taxable, and retailers retain the revenue to offset the costs of providing paper bags or reusable plastic bags.

What is the City of American Canyon's definition of a single-use plastic bag?

"Single-use, plastic carryout bag" means any bag less than 2.25 mil thick and made predominately of plastic derived from petroleum or bio-based sources, such as corn or other plant source, and includes compostable, non-compostable, and biodegradable plastic bags. These are the typical and familiar plastic bags with handles found at most stores.

Bags used within stores, such as bags for produce, bulk foods, meat and seafood, flowers and other similar uses where health, safety and moisture may be a concern will not be affected. In addition, home delivery bags for newspapers, dry cleaning and plastic bags sold in packages (for garbage or pet waste, for example) would be exempt. Plastic bags for take-out orders from restaurants are permitted.

What bags are affected?

All single-use plastic bags provided at the point of checkout for retail sales are covered by the ordinance and as noted in the definition above.

Are there any exceptions to this ban?

Yes. The following uses are exempt from the requirements of the Single-use Bag Reduction



Ordinance:

- Plastic produce bags used for vegetables, fruits and meats or loose bulk items such as nuts, grains, beans and pasta, distributed at grocery stores and farmers markets
- Bags used to protect breakable glass items
- Newspaper, laundry or dry cleaning bags
- Pharmacy bags used to contain prescription drugs
- Bags used for the transportation of prepared take-out foods and liquids from restaurants and other food providers

Isn't there a law that requires me to put alcoholic beverages into a carryout bag?

Since 2011, there has been no [California law](#) that mandates a retailer to provide a bag for purchased alcoholic beverages. If a paper bag with handles is provided, the 10-cent fee must be applied.

If approved, when does the ordinance take effect?

The ordinance is expected to be heard by the City Council in July 2015; however, in order to allow sufficient time for businesses to use up their existing inventory of bags and to adjust to the requirements of the proposed ordinance, implementation of the ordinance will not go into effect until January 1, 2016.

Who is affected by the ordinance?

All retail establishments of all sizes located in the City of American Canyon, including supermarkets and grocery stores, department stores, clothing stores, convenience stores, wineries and tasting rooms, drug stores and pharmacies that provide retail carryout bags will be required to follow this law.

What other communities regulate plastic bags?

Nearby, our neighbors in Marin County have regulations for all supermarkets, drug stores, and convenience stores, and Sonoma County and several cities within Sonoma County recently passed an ordinance affecting all retail establishments. Many other communities throughout the Bay Area have already adopted ordinances similar to ours; in fact, there are currently more than 75 ordinances covering more than 100 cities and counties in California, including many throughout the surrounding area.

Bag bans in California:

Alameda County, Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Dublin, Emeryville, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Napa, Newark, Oakland, Piedmont, Pleasanton, San Leandro, Union City, Arcata, Belmont, Brisbane, Burlingame, Calabasas, Campbell, Capitola, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Carpinteria, Chico, Colma, Culver City, Cupertino, Daly City, Dana Point, Davis, Desert Hot Springs, East Palo Alto, El Cerrito, Fairfax, Fort Bragg, Foster City, Glendale, Half Moon Bay, Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Long Beach, Los Altos, Los Gatos, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, Malibu, Manhattan Beach, Marin County, Mendocino County, Menlo Park, Millbrae, Mill Valley, Monterey, Morgan Hill, Mountain View, Novato,



Ojai, Pacifica, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Palo Alto, Pasadena, Portola Valley, Pittsburg, Redwood City, Richmond, San Bruno, San Carlos, San Francisco, San Jose, San Mateo, San Mateo County, San Luis Obispo County, San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Grover Beach, Morro Bay, Paso Robles, Pismo Beach, San Pablo, San Rafael, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara County, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County, Santa Monica, Sausalito, Solana Beach, Sonoma County, Sonoma, Cloverdale, Cotati, Healdsburg, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol, Windsor, South Lake Tahoe, South Pasadena, South San Francisco, Sunnyvale, Truckee, Ukiah, Walnut Creek, Watsonville, West Hollywood

Bag bans in the U.S.:

Alaska, Arizona, California, Chicago, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Washington

Bag bans in other countries:

Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, England, Eritrea, France, Haiti, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Macedonia, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Mexico, New South Wales, Pakistan, Philippines, Rwanda, Somaliland, Scotland, South Africa, Spain, Taiwan, Tasmania, Tanzania, Uganda, Ulanbaatar, United Arab Emirates, Wales

What damage do plastic bags cause?

Single-use plastic bags are used in extremely high volumes and only a small fraction of them are ever recycled. They are produced from nonrenewable resources and are designed to be disposable (rather than reusable). While some single-use plastic bags are reused, many of them are simply used once and then discarded. Once discarded, single-use plastic bags often remain in the environment for decades or longer. These bags can end up in landfills or be swept away by the wind and get caught in trees, fences, and storm drains. If they are disposed of at all—many end up in the wrong waste bin and jam recycling equipment resulting in work stoppages and loss of efficiency at the waste collection facility.

What about recycling; isn't that a better solution?

According to CalRecycle no more than 3 percent of plastic bags are recycled in California, in spite of the fact that there are bins at all major grocery stores, large retailers and pharmacies. The majority of bags are never recycled or are disposed of improperly; most end up in landfills or waterways. Because we are unable to recycle the bags locally, our only option is to dispose of them into the gray trash containers (which go to the landfill); however many end up in the blue recycling bins, ultimately jamming recycling equipment, resulting in costly work stoppages.

Why not switch to free paper bags?

Although they are recyclable and biodegradable and do not create the same problems associated with litter and marine life, paper bags also have their own environmental impact.



Manufacturing them requires trees as well as large amounts of water. It has been estimated that 14 million trees are cut down every year to make paper bags for shoppers in the U.S. It also takes a significant amount of energy to produce, distribute, and dispose of paper bags.

Wouldn't compostable bags solve the problem?

Being compostable and being composted are two different things. When used to hold wet food waste that goes into an organics composting program, compostable bags can be beneficial. However, compostable bags (such as those made from cornstarch) only break down in an active composting process. They do not decompose in the natural environment because of the lack of heat, or in landfills because of the lack of oxygen.

What is the City of American Canyon's definition of a recycled paper bag?

"Recycled paper bag" means a paper carryout bag provided by a store to a customer at the point of sale that contains no old-growth fiber and a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled material and is 100% recyclable. The word "recyclable" must be printed in some manner on the outside of the bag, along with the name and location of the manufacturer and the percentage of post-consumer recycled content.

What is the City of American Canyon's definition of a reusable bag?

"Reusable bag" means either a bag made of cloth or other machine-washable fabric that has handles, or a durable plastic bag with handles that is at least 2.25 mil thick and is specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse.

Why are reusable bags better for the environment?

Reusable bags can be used many times, and thus create less landfill waste and fewer environmental impacts than plastic bags intended to be used only once.

How will I carry my groceries home? I need those free bags.

Single-use plastic grocery bags aren't free. Supermarkets recoup the estimated 2 to 5 cents they pay per plastic bag by increasing the price of groceries, meaning even people who bring their own bags to the store are supplementing the cost of plastic bags. A small investment in reusable bags will pay for itself within a few uses, and some markets give rebates to customers who bring their own bags to the store. Additionally, there is nothing in the ordinance that prohibits customers from bringing their own bags of any type to take home their groceries or other purchases.

What is the benefit to me? What is the benefit to the community?

The Single-use Bag Reduction Ordinance will result in less litter, which is important, not just for environmental reasons, but also because our community receives a significant economic return by preserving our natural resources and beautiful surroundings. In addition, reducing plastic bags provide less risk of increased trash bills due to equipment breakdowns, less threat and damage to local wildlife and waterways, and serves as a good lesson for all of us on conserving resources.



Where can I get reusable bags?

Reusable bags are widely available for purchase at select retail stores and markets and many organizations and businesses offer such bags through promotions and events for free. Don't overlook the bags you already have in your home or office—tote bags made of canvas or nylon, for example.

Are reusable bags safe? Won't they harbor germs?

There are no credible studies making a connection between reusable bags and foodborne illness. In fact, a 2010 study by Californians Against Waste shows that reusable bags have no more bacteria than other items you bring home from the store. Using common sense, washing your hands, and washing bags when they get dirty reduces the risk of illness.

What if I forget my reusable bags?

Getting used to new habits takes a little time and practice. If you forget your bag, most stores will offer reusable paper bags for a minimal charge, generally 10 cents. To avoid needing to buy bags, keep reusable bags in the car and tuck a small, collapsible bag into your purse or glove box or attach one to your keychain for quick shopping trips. Pretty soon, bringing your own reusable bags into stores will become second nature—just like fastening your seatbelt.

What if I can't afford to purchase a reusable bag?

Stores are required to provide customers participating in the California Special Supplemental Food program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and customers participating in the Supplemental Food (SNAP) program with a reusable bag or recycled paper bag at no cost at the point of sale.

Why is there a 10-cent fee on recycled paper or plastic carryout bags? Is it a tax?

The 10-cent fee on recycled paper or plastic carryout bags is intended to encourage customers to bring reusable bags and reduce their dependence on single-use bags of all types, both paper and plastic. All of the revenue from the cost pass-through remains with the store; it is not a tax and none of it goes to the city.

What types of retail establishments are required to charge 10 cents for each recycled paper or plastic bag?

All retail businesses included in the ordinance are prohibited from distributing free single-use plastic and paper carryout bags. If businesses decide to make recycled paper carryout bags available for their customers, they are required to sell them for not less than 10 cents per bag. The charge must be listed as a single line item on the customer's receipt and is not taxable to the consumer according to the State Board of Equalization.

How can I avoid the charge?

You can avoid the charge by bringing your own bag or reusing a bag when you make a small purchase that is easy to carry without a bag. Just say no to a disposable bag.

**I use plastic bags to pick up my pet's waste. What will I use instead?**

Local pet stores sell bags specifically for this purpose and sale of these bags will not be affected by this ordinance in any way. Existing pet waste stations on trails and in parks will continue to provide plastic bags for discarding pet waste. There will still be many plastic bags in circulation, and you can continue to use bread or chip bags, produce, bulk or cereal bags, or newspaper bags. In addition, while the ordinance restricts single-use plastic grocery and retail bags, it doesn't restrict produce bags available in-store, which may easily be used for picking up pet waste.

Do bag bans really work?

Yes. Jurisdictions that have instituted similar bans have seen significant changes in the amount of bags used. One year after LA County implemented its bag ban, there was a 95% reduction in the distribution of all single-use bags, including a 30% reduction in paper bags. San Jose has seen an 89% reduction of plastic bag litter in storm drains, a 60% reduction in creeks, and a 59% reduction in city streets.

What about the proposed statewide plastic bag law?

Senate Bill 270, a bill to make California the first in the nation to impose a statewide ban on plastic bags is on hold pending a state-wide vote at the November 2016 election. The purpose of a local plastic bag reduction ordinance is to tailor the requirements to suit our needs. If the senate bill ultimately becomes law, the City's ordinance will take precedence over the state law.

Why isn't this going on the ballot for a vote?

The California Constitution authorizes the City to "make and enforce within its limits all local, police, sanitary and other ordinances and regulations not in conflict with general laws." There is nothing under either state or federal law that constrains the City's ability to regulate the sale of bags or to prohibit the sale of disposable bags of a certain manufacture type. Some local measures that impose special taxes must be placed on the ballot; however, the proposed ordinance does not create any special tax, nor does it generate any revenue or general fund money for the city. Thus, it is not subject to this requirement.

Plus, with four community meetings to discuss the proposed city ordinance and public comment at City Council when the item is heard on June 17, residents of American Canyon—and business owners who may not reside in American Canyon—have the opportunity to have their voices heard and provide input and feedback directly to elected officials rather than just a yes or no vote on the ballot.

How will the ordinance be enforced?

The Code Enforcement Division of the Community Development Department of the City of American Canyon is responsible for enforcing the City's [Municipal Code](#).

**What happens to businesses that do not comply?**

The City of American Canyon will focus primarily on education and helping businesses comply. For those who are persistently out of compliance, a warning can be issued and fines may be imposed, ranging from \$100 to \$500, based on provisions relating to enforcement of violations of code set forth under Chapter 19.12 of the [American Canyon Municipal Code](#).

What is being done to educate the public?

Information about new options for residents and customers will be shared online, in newsletters and local media, through point-of-purchase information, in training sessions for retailer staff, and through outreach at community events. A reusable bag promotion is also being developed in order to support local retailers in transition.

Where can I get more information?

There are many sources of available information. Our local NRWS (Recology American Canyon) has great information on what we can do with items that can be recycled—visit [Recology American Canyon](#).

Other resources include Californians Against Waste, Clean Seas Coalition and Green Cities California, igotmybag.org (local cities working together to promote use of reusable bags), and “Bag It—The Movie” (bagitmovie.com) is an eye-opening, yet entertaining feature on plastic bag use and pollution here in our country and in others.