

Tacoma Considering Disposable Shopping Bag Restrictions



The Tacoma City Council may consider an ordinance on disposable shopping bags in 2016. The Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability is conducting outreach and seeking feedback on this topic on behalf of the Council's Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability Committee.

Why restrict disposable shopping bags?

Though plastic shopping bags make up only a fraction of Tacoma's waste stream (less than 0.5% by weight) these single-use items can create a nuisance in the form of litter on streets and in parks and can cause harm to marine wildlife.

Paper bags are not necessarily more sustainable than plastic bags. Although recycled at a significantly higher rate, paper bags produce more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and require more overall resource consumption than plastic bags.

Thirteen communities in Washington State and countless others around the world have placed restrictions on single-use plastic and paper bags. Restricting disposable shopping bags is intended to increase the use of reusable shopping bags while reducing resource use, litter and waste.

"One reusable shopping bag can replace between 57 and 315 disposable plastic bags in one year according to life-cycle analyses."

Florida Department of Environment Protection

An estimated two billion disposable plastic shopping bags are used in Washington State each year.

Disposable bag regulations in other communities have shown the following:

- Voluntary reusable bag programs and outreach and education efforts are valuable, but have minimal impact on shifting consumer behavior.
- Banning plastic bags eliminates their use, but typically increases paper bag use if the ban is not accompanied by a fee on paper bags.
- When a fee is placed on disposable paper bags, the fee amount matters. A small fee (\$0.05) may only reduce paper bag use minimally; a higher fee (\$0.10 - \$0.25) may have a greater impact.

Give Your Feedback

Attend the upcoming Sustainable Tacoma Commission meeting. Public testimony occurs during the last half-hour of the meeting.

Sustainable Tacoma Commission

Tuesday, December 8
3:30 PM to 5:30 PM
9th Floor Visibility Center
Tacoma Municipal Building
747 Market Street

For more information and to take the feedback survey by January 15th visit
www.cityoftacoma.org/ShoppingBags



City of Tacoma
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability
Sustainability@cityoftacoma.org

Tacoma Considering Disposable Shopping Bag Restrictions

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a “disposable” shopping bag?

“Disposable” shopping bags are often defined as those typically given out at check-out aisles and include both plastic bags (“t-shirt” bags) and paper bags. Disposable shopping bags do not include other paper or plastic bags such as deli and produce bags, advertising and promotional bags, pet waste bags, or yard waste bags.

What if I already reuse my shopping bags for pet waste or trash can liners?

Though reuse of disposable shopping bags is certainly better than immediate disposal, a restriction would be intended to increase reusable bag use and minimize paper and plastic bag waste and litter. Pet waste bags, trash can liners and other plastic bags would still be available for purchase at grocery and other stores in Tacoma.

Isn't recycling these bags good enough?

Tacoma accepts disposable plastic bags for recycling at the curbside and at the Transfer and Recovery Center; however, if plastic bags aren't recycled properly (bundled into one bag and tied at the top) they can jam recycling equipment causing costly shutdowns to machinery. Many large stores offer plastic bag recycling, but recycling rates for these bags remain very low—less than 6 percent nationally.

How might this affect low-income residents?

Low income citizens would likely be exempt from these restrictions. Most disposable shopping bag restriction models include exemptions for people receiving SNAP, WIC, TANF or FAP benefits. The City may consider providing free reusable bags to low income individuals.

How would restrictions be enforced?

If action is taken, enforcement might include self-reporting, random inspections, and/or complaint-based follow up, and penalties could include written warnings and fines.

When would restrictions take effect?

A disposable bag restriction could take effect in 2016, though this will be shaped by feedback from community members. Many bag ban programs delay implementation for several months to allow retail stores to use their existing supply of disposable bags.

For more information and to take the feedback survey by January 15th visit

www.cityoftacoma.org/ShoppingBags



City of Tacoma
Office of Environmental Policy and Sustainability
Sustainability@cityoftacoma.org