

# Bring Your Own Bag

Effective July 12, 2017



## SHOPPER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is the Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) law?

The BYOB law is a ban on thin plastic checkout bags (less than 2.25 mils) and a fee on recycled paper and other retailer provided checkout bags. The law is meant to reduce waste and littering and encourages shoppers to bring their own bag rather than buying a new bag each time they shop.



### Why was BYOB passed?

BYOB was passed to address the problems associated with disposable checkout bags. Each year an estimated 70 – 100 million disposable plastic checkout bags are used in Tacoma. These bags contribute to the waste stream, create unsightly litter, and threaten marine life. Disposable paper bags also have significant life cycle impacts by consuming energy and releasing greenhouse gas emissions. Choosing to “bring your own bag” helps improve the health of our community and our environment.

### What bags are still available?

Retailers may distribute paper checkout bags made of at least 40% recycled content. Retailers may also distribute other qualified checkout bags that are designed for long-term multiple reuse. Any checkout bag provided to the customer will be charged a minimum pass-through fee of five cents. Other non-checkout bags are still available such as produce bags used to package meat and bulk items inside the store before purchasing, dry-cleaning bags, and tire bags.

### Will I be charged if I bring my own bag to reuse?

No, you can bring any type of bag (reusable, paper or plastic) with you when you shop and you will not be charged to use it.

### Where does the pass-through fee go?

The pass-through fee is kept by the retailer to offset the cost of providing recycled content paper or reusable bags which are usually more expensive than disposable plastic bags.

### How are low-income residents impacted?

All residents are encouraged to bring their own reusable bag when shopping, but people with EBT, WIC or TANF benefits do not have to pay the pass-through fee when they receive a paper checkout bag.

### How is BYOB enforced?

Enforcement is mainly complaint based. Compliance complaints are being facilitated through TacomaFIRST 311. Residents can call 3-1-1 within Tacoma city limits or (253) 591-5000. Or visit [cityoftacoma.org/TacomaFIRST311](http://cityoftacoma.org/TacomaFIRST311), click Make a Request, click Miscellaneous Solid Waste Request or Complaints from the list, fill out the form and choose BYOB Complaint from the dropdown. The complaint will go to Solid Waste and a staff member will do educational visits/outreach to the store and work with them to get into compliance.



## What stores are affected?

All retail stores in the city of Tacoma are affected by the law. This includes grocery stores, convenience stores, department stores, hardware stores, liquor stores, pharmacies, farmers markets and others.

## Can disposable plastic bags be used for takeout food?

Restaurants, grocery stores and others that sell takeout food can provide disposable plastic bags for prepared take-out foods and liquids intended for consumption away from the premises. This is to safeguard public health and safety during transportation of take-out foods.

## Is the City giving away free reusable bags?

Yes, the City is give away free reusable checkout bags while supplies last. These are being distributed through food banks, Tacoma Public Libraries, Tacoma Housing Authority, other community service organizations, community events, and Tacoma FIRST 311 at the Tacoma Municipal Building. The City also implemented a Bag Share program with sites at community gathering locations around Tacoma.

## Should I wash my reusable bags?

Yes, to keep reusable bags clean the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department recommends that you wrap raw meat in plastic and throw away the plastic bag, keep reusable bags dry when not in use, wash cloth bags once a week in hot water with detergent and dry in the dryer, and clean plastic lined reusable bags with hot water and soap and allow to air dry before storing.

## What kind of reusable bag is best?

Many Life Cycle Analysis studies have found that lightweight reusable bags made from recycled plastics (polypropylene) are the most environmentally friendly choice. Bags made from cotton canvas are resource intensive but may be extremely long-lived. There are also some lightweight bags, some of which may be of recycled content, which will not be long-lived. As with any utilitarian item, material, cost and quality will make a huge difference, depending on how it is used.

That said, the best kind of reusable bag for you is the one you actually reuse!

## I reuse my plastic checkout bags for other things (trash bin liners, lunch, pet waste, etc.). What do I do now that these are banned?

In other cities with similar laws, residents generally find substitutes. Try packing lunch in a reusable bag, go without a bin liner for your small trash bins, and look for pet waste specific bags in grocery stores or in city parks. You may also use empty plastic bags from the newspaper, bread, cereal and other packaged items.

## What are other ways to reduce disposable checkout bags?

Communities are using a variety of methods to reduce disposable checkout bags. Unfortunately, education alone is the least effective methods of getting people to switch to reusable bags. Common methods today range from banning plastic bags, to banning plastic bags with a fee on paper bags (5–25 cents), to putting a fee on both plastic and paper bags (5–10 cents). Eleven other Washington communities have chosen the same model as Tacoma, commonly called the “Bellingham Model”, while four other Washington communities have chosen to just ban plastic bags.

## How can I learn more?

Visit [cityoftacoma.org/shoppingbags](http://cityoftacoma.org/shoppingbags) for educational resources and information related to the BYOB law. You can also call (253) 591-5172 or email [sustainability@cityoftacoma.org](mailto:sustainability@cityoftacoma.org) and request to join the BYOB Listserv to be updated by email.

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