



## Single-Use Plastic Bag Ban Frequently Asked Questions

### Background

#### **What is the proposed Single-Use Plastic Bag Ban?**

The City of West Hollywood is developing an ordinance to ban single-use plastic bags. We are presently conducting research and outreach to promote the proposed ban and provide information on impacts and resources to aid in compliance.

Once approved, the Plastic Bag Ban Ordinance will no longer allow the distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags in supermarkets and retail stores. Paper bags with at least 40% post-consumer recycled content will be offered for a 10-cent fee. Through this initiative, residents will have the opportunity to personally contribute toward reducing waste in the City by using reusable bags.

The proposed Plastic Bag Ban Ordinance is consistent with a ban already in place in Los Angeles County, and is similar to bans in nearby cities including Santa Monica, Pasadena, and Long Beach. Additionally, the City of Los Angeles is considering approving its own reusable bag policy.

#### **Why is the City proposing to prohibit the distribution of single-use plastic bags?**

The most compelling reasons are the waste, cost, and pollution that result from the use of plastic bags. Additionally, the City is concerned with the conservation of resources for future generations and promoting sustainable business practices.

Each year more than \$300 million is paid by government agencies in California to pick up and dispose of litter<sup>1</sup>. The enormous cost of litter disposal is a significant and unnecessary waste of limited taxpayer dollars as well as plastic and paper resources that can be recycled. Making matters worse is the harm plastic and paper pollution has on our environment over many years. The policy is a good step forward to help protect our quality of life and our future.

### For Retailers

#### **How will this policy affect me?**

The proposed policy would prohibit supermarkets and all retail stores from distributing single-use plastic shopping bags to customers. Stores will be permitted to provide paper bags with a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content at a 10-cent fee to customers. This fee is to be retained by the store, to compensate for the costs of providing paper bags. Many stores may choose to have reusable bags available at a cost to customers.

**What qualifies as a retail store?**

Retail establishment means any commercial retail facility that sells goods or provides merchandise directly to the ultimate consumer, including, but not limited to, grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores, “mini-marts,” clothing stores, newsstands, retail stores and vendors selling goods or merchandise from a kiosk (as that term is used in Title 19).

**When will the policy begin?**

Once adopted, the single-use plastic bag ban will be implemented in two phases. Supermarkets and large retail establishments over 10,000 SF will be required to comply within six months of the effective date of the ordinance. Small markets, retail stores and pharmacies under 10,000 SF will have up to 12 months to comply from the effective date of the ordinance. This allows smaller establishments a longer transition period to minimize their costs in changing bag types.

**Are there any exemptions to this policy?**

Single-use plastic bags for transporting produce and raw meat products to the point of sale will be excluded, primarily for health and safety reasons. Additionally, restaurants and other food service providers will be allowed to provide plastic bags to customers for prepared take-out food intended for off-premises consumption. Farmers markets will also initially be exempt.

**Are there any reporting requirements?**

The ordinance will include a provision for voluntary annual reporting by affected businesses regarding total number of bags used and paper bag fees collected (if applicable) to enable the City to track the impact of the ban.

**How will the Plastic Bag Ban be enforced?**

West Hollywood Commercial Code Compliance will be responsible for enforcement of the ban.

**For Residents**

**How will this policy affect me?**

Most retail stores will no longer provide single-use plastic bags to shoppers. Paper bags will be provided for a 10-cent fee. Customers can bring their own reusable bags, pay for paper bags, or buy reusable bags that will be available for sale at the point of purchase in many stores.

In order to avoid placing a heavy burden on the poorest of the City’s residents, those who qualify for subsidized groceries through programs such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program will likely be exempt from the 10-cent paper bag fee.

**Are single-use plastics bags really that harmful?**

Yes. Plastic bags are environmentally damaging, from their production as an oil-based product, to the damage they cause in clogging up landfills, the litter they cause on beaches and in

waterways, and the harm they cause marine life when they end up in our bays and ocean. Furthermore, plastic debris in the ocean breaks down into particles that are eaten by plankton, fish, and other marine life which in turn are consumed by humans<sup>2,3</sup>.

Despite recycling programs and concerns over environmental health, generally only 5% of plastic bags are recycled. The majority of both plastic and paper bags used end up in landfills or as litter, polluting our environment.

#### **Facts about Plastic Bag Use:**

- Less than 5% of the 19 billion plastic bags used annually in California are actually recycled<sup>4</sup>.
- An average American could avoid using 500 single-use bags per year by switching to reusable bags<sup>5</sup>.
- Plastic bags are used for an average time of 12 minutes<sup>6</sup>.

#### **What about paper bags?**

Like plastic bags, paper bags have an impact on the environment because they require resources to produce, transport, and recycle. Unlike plastic bags, however, paper bags are not petroleum-based, they can be made from entirely recycled materials, they are not as harmful to the environment as a source of litter, and they are generally both compostable and biodegradable. The City of West Hollywood will therefore allow paper bags with a minimum of 40% post-consumer recycled content to be provided by retail stores for a 10-cent fee per bag.

#### **Why are reusable bags better for the environment?**

Reusable bags reduce the amount of plastic and paper bags that end up in our landfills and in our environment because they can be used over and over again. In the long term, reusable bags demand fewer resources and create less greenhouse gas emissions.

#### **Isn't it hard to remember to bring your own reusable bag every time you go shopping?**

Here are some tips to remember to bring your own reusable bag:

- Keep your reusable bags in the front seat of your car or at the front door, not in the trunk of a car or in a closet where they are forgotten
- After you empty and wash your bags, place them by the door, in your car or near your keys
- If you forget to bring your reusable bags into the store, go back and get them
- If you forget your reusable bags in the car, keep items in your cart after checkout, and transfer them to your reusable bags when you get to your car
- Write a note to "Bring your bags!" on your shopping list

Some supermarkets have already started to promote the use of reusable bags and sell them at a reasonable price. Others have posted reminders in their parking lots and in front of their stores.

**How do I care for my reusable bag?**

The best reusable bags are those that are machine washable so they can be cleaned properly to prevent germs. Wash them as often as necessary, or as often as you would wash towels. Many people choose to designate different styles of bags for different types of products; such as separate bags for animal products, produce, and dry goods. Some reusable bags cannot be placed in the washing machine, so check the manufacturer's disinfecting and cleaning instructions.

**Where can I get more updates?**

For more information, please visit <http://www.weho.org/plasticbagban>

## References

1. California State Assembly, AB 1466  
<[ftp://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab\\_1451-1500/ab\\_1466\\_cfa\\_20040109\\_113151\\_asm\\_comm.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/03-04/bill/asm/ab_1451-1500/ab_1466_cfa_20040109_113151_asm_comm.html)>
2. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Marine Debris Program  
<<http://marinedebris.noaa.gov/info/plasticdet.html>>
3. Possatto et al., "Plastic debris ingestion by marine catfish: An unexpected fisheries impact," 2011.
4. Recycling based on 2011 Bureau of Sanitation estimates. Total generation based on Los Angeles County "An Overview of Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County: A Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors." August 2007.
5. American Plastic Manufacturing, <http://www.apmbags.com/bagmyths>
6. Save the Bay. <<http://www.savesfbay.org/about-campaign#what>>

## Other Sources

1. City of Los Angeles, Proposed Reusable Bag Policy. Frequently Asked Questions and Fact Sheet.  
< [www.zerowaste.lacity.org](http://www.zerowaste.lacity.org)>
2. HDR Engineering, Policy Tools for Reducing Impact of Single-Use, Carryout Plastic Bags and EPS Food Packaging, June 2, 2008.
3. The ULS Report, "Review of Life Cycle Data Relating to Disposable, Compostable, Biodegradable, and Reusable Grocery Bags," March 28, 2008