Reusable Bag Ordinance Frequently Asked Questions

ORDINANCE DETAILS

What is a Reusable Bag Ordinance?

Retail stores in Cupertino will no longer be allowed to distribute disposable, thin plastic carryout bags. Recycled paper bags may be distributed with a minimum charge of ten cents per bag. Reusable bags are encouraged.

When will Cupertino's Reusable Bag Ordinance take effect?

October 1, 2013

Which stores do this ordinance effect?

Any commercial establishment that sells perishable or nonperishable goods, such as a grocery, pharmacy, liquor, convenience, clothing, pet, electronic, and hardware stores.

Are other cities in the Bay Area moving forward with an ordinance?

Yes. The City of Cupertino is one of 24 participating agencies that have been included in a Reusable Bag Ordinance Environmental Impact Report to evaluate the

benefits of banning plastic and paper carryout bags at point of sale. The City of San Jose, Mountain View, Palo Alto and Sunnyvale have already adopted an ordinance banning the use of carryout bags.

PROHIBITED BAGS

Why is the City prohibiting biodegradable carryout bags?

Disposable, thin biodegradable plastic bags are not preferred over plastic bags because their impact is uncertain. Researchers testing biodegradable bags in composting conditions found that they did not degrade sufficiently. The City's commercial composting facility does not accept biodegradable bags because they don't break down within the timeframe required to compost organic material (food-waste, yardwaste, cardboard and other paper products). Biodegradable bags contaminate the

City's compostable and recyclable waste stream and contribute to similar litter and pollution impacts onto waterways as regular plastic bags.

Why is the City of Cupertino regulating carryout bags?

A high quality reusable bag has potential to replace up to 31,000,000 plastic carryout bags used in Cupertino per year, significantly reducing impacts onto the environment made by both bags. Plastic bags are one of the most common litter problems, and paper bags consume more water and energy to produce, and require cutting of trees to manufacture. Each Cupertino resident can save up to 530

plastic and paper carryout bags per year by using a reusable bag¹.

REUSABLE BAGS

What is a reusable bag?

A reusable bag is a bag made from cloth or other machine washable fabric that has handles, or a durable plastic bag with handles that is at least 2.25 mil thick, specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse.

Won't dirty reusable bags potentially be contaminated with bacteria and spread prevalent viruses?

Research conducted in San Jose's 2010 Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance Environmental Impact Report concluded that a reusable bag contains fewer bacteria than common household items. A reusable bag contains an average of 1,000 colony forming units (cfu)² of bacteria, compared to a kitchen countertop containing 144,000 (cfu), a toothbrush containing up to 1,000,000 (cfu)³, and a kitchen sponge that containing 9,620,000 (cfus)¹.

How do I care for reusable bags?

Just like caring for any reusable item, remember to wash reusable bags routinely or wipe the inside of the bag with a warm soapy sponge.

Where can I buy reusable bags?

Reusable bags are sold at many retail locations. Grocery, pet, and clothing stores are a few examples of locations that offer reusable bags. You may also pick up a free reusable bag at City Hall while supplies last.

How can I make my own reusable bag?

Turn an old t-shirt into a reusable bag by following the instructions provided at the link below:

http://www.marthastewart.com/266942/t-shirt-bag

What type of reusable bag is the most sustainable?

A cloth or canvas reusable bag has potential to last up to 15 years, and replace thousands of plastic or paper carryout bags, significantly reducing consumption of fossil fuels and trees.

How can I remember to bring a reusable bag when going shopping?

Place bags by the front door or by a set of keys.

ALTERNATIVES TO PROHIBITED PLASTIC CARRYOUT BAGS

What bags can I use to pick up pet excrement with?

Produce, pasta, newspaper or bread bags can prove to be more efficient alternatives than a plastic carryout bag.

What bags can I line my trash can with?

Purchase trash can liners or reuse restaurant bags or a paper bag.

PAPER BAG CHARGES

Will the charge for paper bags stay at ten cents?

The charge on paper carryout bags will remain at ten cents.

Why is the City placing a charge on paper bags?

Paper bags do have fewer litter-related negative effects on water quality than thin plastic carryout bags; however the manufacturing

process requires about three times more water than thin plastic bags, generates more greenhouse gas emissions and air acidification, and may utilize various chemicals such as fertilizers, and pesticides in the production of the pulp used to make the bags. Therefore, a one-for-one switch from plastic to free paper carryout bags would result in a negative environmental impact.

Who keeps the ten cent charge for paper or durable plastic reusable bags?

Retailers will keep the charge placed on paper bags to cover the cost of transitioning to the new type of bags.

How can I avoid paying ten cents per bag?

Remember to bring a reusable bag when shopping or decline a bag when making small purchases.

Is a store allowed to charge more than ten cents for a recycled paper or reusable bag?

It is up to the discretion of a store to charge more than ten cents for any bag distributed.

EXEMPTIONS

What customers are exempt from the Ordinance?

Customers paying with Supplemental Food Program for Women Infant & Children (WIC), CalFresh or food stamps cards are exempt from paper bag charges.

Will restaurants be prohibited from distributing plastic or paper carryout bags?

No. Restaurants and any public eating establishment that receives 90% or more of its revenue from the sale of prepared food are exempt and will still be allowed to distribute plastic and paper carryout bags free of charge.

What retailers are exempt from the Ordinance?

Charitable nonprofit reusers (e.g Goodwill) may provide free paper carryout bags at no charge to customers.

What kind of carryout bags will still be allowed for use in Cupertino?

Protective plastic and paper bags, without handles, used to segregate and transport produce, meat, greeting cards or medication to the checkout stand may still be provided at no charge. Paper bags of 40% postconsumer recycled content paper will be allowed for distribution with a minimum charge of ten cents per bag. Reusable bags are encouraged.

Why are large garbage bags not being prohibited?

Heftier garbage bags are preferred because they are not as likely to blow away, become litter, clog the storm drainage system, impact creeks and the Bay, and are not free so their use is generally limited to what is needed.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Do plastic bags impair local Cupertino creeks?

Plastic bags are frequently found in Stevens and Calabazas Creeks during litter clean up events.

