



City of Cupertino's

Reusable Bag Ordinance

What is a Reusable Bag Ordinance?

Retail stores in Cupertino are not 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 did 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.

What kind of carryout bags are still 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 are allowed for distribution with a minimum charge of ten cents per bag. Reusable bags are encouraged.

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 mils thick, specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse.

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. The charge is not taxable.

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.

Why is the City of Cupertino regulating carryout bags?

Plastic bags are one of the most common litter problems, and State law requires Cupertino to keep litter out of waterways. Meanwhile paper bags consume more water and energy to produce and require cutting of trees to manufacture. For these reasons the use of reusable bags is encouraged. Each Cupertino resident can save up to 530 plastic and paper carryout bags per year by using a reusable bag¹.



Who is exempt from the Reusable Bag Ordinance?

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

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

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

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)², and a kitchen sponge that containing 9,620,000 (cfus)¹. 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.

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 will I use to pick up pet excrement with?

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

What will I line my trash can with?

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

Will the charge for paper bags stay at ten cents?

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

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.

**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.

Will compostable carryout bags still be allowed for use?

No. Compostable bags are not designed for reuse, are thinner than plastic carryout bags, and are not recyclable.

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

Yes. The majority of cities in the Bay Area had already adopted an ordinance banning the use of carryout bags even before the statewide law became law in 2017.

Do plastic bags impair local Cupertino creeks?

Plastic bags were frequently found in Stevens and Calabazas Creeks during litter clean up events. Since the bag ban it has become far more uncommon to find them.

Stevens Creek 2011



Calabazas Creek 2011



Sampling of material extracted
from 1/8 mile of Creek.



1 San Mateo Reusable Bag Draft Environmental Impact Report, 2012
2 Journal of Applied Microbiology, 1997