

Town of York, Plastic Bag Ordinance

Questions and Answers for Consumers

Q. What is the York Bag Ordinance?



A. In November 2015, York voters approved a new town ordinance entitled: SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CARRY OUT BAG ORDINANCE. In short, the ordinance prohibits distribution of single-use plastic carryout bags from all retail establishments. While paper carryout bags will be allowed, the intent is to encourage the use of reusable bags. The ordinance begins to take effect on March 3, 2016.

Q. Why are plastic bags a problem?

A. Thin-film plastic bags have become the dominant carryout bag because of their low cost and convenience. Even when properly disposed of they frequently blow away, becoming unsightly litter. They cannot be recycled in curb-side programs, so only a very small percentage of them get recycled at all. Coastal communities like York are both specially impacted and particularly responsible for addressing these impacts. These impacts include, but are not limited to: contributing to the death of marine animals through ingestion and entanglement; contributing to pollution of the land and marine environment; imposing an unnecessary burden on our solid waste management; clogging storm drainage systems; and requiring the use of non-renewable fossil fuels for manufacture. Learn more at www.BYOBYork.org.

Q. Are all plastic bags banned?

A. No. The only kind of bag that is prohibited is the thin-film plastic bag with integral handles. These are seen most often at the checkout counter in supermarkets and pharmacies as well as many other retail establishments. The ordinance does not apply to plastic bags *without* integral handles, or of substantial thickness (over 3 mils thick), such as:

- Plastic bags for loose items (fruits, vegetables, nuts, candies, hardware items)
- Plastic bags used for frozen or wet fresh foods, meats, fish or poultry, flowers, or potted plants
- Plastic newspaper and door-hanger bags
- Plastic laundry, dry cleaning, or garment bags
- Plastic garbage or pet-waste bags

Q. What York businesses are affected by the ordinance?

A. Any commercial enterprise engaged in the sale of food or merchandise including but not limited to grocery and convenience stores, markets, pharmacies, restaurants, take-out food purveyors, seasonal and temporary businesses and other merchandise retailers. Nonprofit and religious organizations are not considered retail establishments.

Q & A for Consumers (Cont'd)

Q. Aren't plastic bags recyclable?

A. Yes, but not easily. They cannot be put into town curbside recycling bins and therefore only a small percentage of these bags actually get recycled. In addition, the value of the recycled bags is small in comparison to the cost to process them so most still wind up in landfills. All thin films and bags, including bread bags or newspaper bags, are still recyclable at both Hannaford and Rite Aid.

Q. What's the alternative – paper bags? Aren't they as bad as plastic bags?

A. No. Like plastic bags, paper bags are not designed for repeated use and require energy and natural resources to produce and transport. Unlike plastic bags, however, paper bags are easily recycled curbside and do not recirculate through the environment. However, the best alternatives are reusable bags.

Q. How will this ban affect me?

A. Effective March 1, 2016, York stores may offer alternative types of bag including paper or reusable bags. You may, of course, bring your own reusable bags. Plastic bags, sized and designed for household uses such as waste can liners or pet waste, remain available for purchase in stores and online. Sources of “free” bags for pet waste are: empty newspaper bags, bread bags, frozen food bags, produce bags, used food storage bags, etc.

Q. Why is Getting Rid of Single-use Plastic Bags a Good Thing?

A.

- The use of single-use plastic carryout bags has significant impacts on the marine and land environments of all coastal communities that outweigh their usefulness to the public.
- The majority of single-use plastic bags are used to carryout products purchased from stores; they quickly wind up in landfills or the environment where they can last for centuries.
- These bags endanger wildlife, add microplastics to oceans and inland waterways, damage solid waste disposal systems, and become eyesores in our landscapes.
- State and local voluntary efforts to control the use of or to recycle single-use plastic carryout bags over the last decade have had minimal effect.
- Most municipal curbside recycling programs do not accept single-use carryout plastic bags. This is true in York.
- Reusable alternatives to these bags are readily available.



The Town of York strives to conserve resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, waste, and litter and to protect the public health and welfare, including wildlife, all of which increase the quality of life for the Town's residents and visitors. The York bag ordinance is one example of the citizens of York valuing the quality of our environment.

For more information: www.BYOBYork.org