



Bureau of Planning and Sustainability  
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## Promoting Reusable Checkout Bags in Portland One-Year Report October 3, 2012

### Banning Single Use Plastic Checkout Bags

Portland City Council adopted Ordinance 184759 on July 21, 2011 to promote reusable shopping bags and reduce use of single use plastic checkout bags. That Ordinance required that the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) return to the Portland City Council with a one-year progress report and recommendations for its refinement and expansion.

Effective October 15, 2011, the ordinance required that selected stores only provide recycled paper bags or reusable checkout bags to customers. Ordinance 184759 applies to about 167 mostly grocery stores and pharmacies with gross annual sales of \$2 million and large retailers over 10,000 square feet that have a pharmacy.

Reusable bags and educational materials for low income residents and seniors were distributed in five different languages by the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) in partnership with Elders in Action, Loaves and Fishes, Oregon Food Bank and other service organizations.

### Findings

Marking almost one year since implementation, BPS contacted affected retailers to request information about their experience. BPS received aggregate data of 23 retailers that are members of the Northwest Grocers Association (NWGA) and a smaller number of responses from other retailers.

- The BPS received fewer than five consumer complaints regarding non-compliance but found no cause to issue penalties.
- Reusable checkout bag use increased 304 percent.
- Highly recycled paper checkout bag use increased 491 percent.

### Options

When Portland City Council adopted Ordinance 184759 on July 21, 2011, it was described as a first step to promote the use of reusable checkout bags.



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Portland's initial policy addresses the large grocery store and pharmacy users of single-use plastic bags, but this initial scope represents only a modest share of total single-use checkout bag use.

Over the past year, a number of jurisdictions have adopted single-use check out bag policies to cover more or all retailers or restaurants. Other jurisdictions that have banned single-use plastic bags have also opted to require businesses to charge for single-use paper bags, typically requiring a minimum of five or 10 cents. This charge is intended to enable retailers to recover part or all of the additional cost of paper bags while also providing customers a clear incentive to bring their own bags. In Washington, DC, for example, where a five-cent charge on disposable bags took effect on January 1, 2010, the city estimates that check out bag use declined by 80 percent from 2009 to 2010. Examples from cities on the West Coast include the following:

- Corvallis, 2012 (ban, charge)

Banned plastic bags at all retail establishments starting January 1, 2013 for retailers with more than 50 full-time equivalent employees and July 1, 2013 for retailers with 50 or fewer full-time equivalent employees. Requires five-cent charge for paper bags; retailers keep money.

- Eugene, pending (ban, charge)

First work session on potential ban was in February 2012 and included preliminary discussions of a plastic bag ban and a five-cent charge on paper bags. Council hearing is scheduled for October 22, 2012.

- Los Angeles, pending (ban, charge)

City Council voted in May 2012 to have staff draft an ordinance based on Los Angeles County ordinance, which includes a ban on plastic bags and 10 cent charge for paper bags. The City has issued a notice of preparation of Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and is currently holding a public review period (September 20 - October 19, 2012).

- Los Angeles County, 2010 (ban, charge)

Banned plastic bags in large and small retail establishments in unincorporated County. Phased implementation 2011, 2012. Requires 10 cent charge on paper bags; retailers keep money.



- San Francisco, 2007, 2012 (ban, charge)

Initial 2007 ordinance banned plastic bags at large grocery stores and pharmacies. A 2012 ordinance expanded the policy to cover all retailers starting October 2012 and all restaurants October 2013. The 2012 ordinance also requires businesses to charge a minimum of 10 cents for all other bags—recyclable paper bags, compostable bags and reusable bags. Businesses keep money.

- Santa Cruz, 2012 (ban, charge)

Banned plastic bags at all retail stores effective April 2013. Requires 10 cent charge on paper bags.

- Seattle, 2011 (ban, charge)

Banned plastic bags at all retail stores effective July 1, 2012. Requires that stores charge at least five cents for typical paper grocery bags. Allows retailers to charge for smaller bags or provide them for free. Allows retailers to provide carryout bags of plastic 2.25 mil or thicker, with or without charge. Retailers are required to show all bag charges on receipts; businesses keep money.

### Proposed Next Steps for Portland

Based on information from the first year of Portland's single use bag policy and research of efforts in other jurisdictions, BPS proposes to undertake a review of policy options, including:

1. Maintain ban of single use plastic check out bags (current policy)
2. Expand current policy to include all retailers:
  - PRO: Decreases consumption of single use plastic bags.
  - CON: Does not necessarily reduce single use bag consumption, as there would be a significant shift to recycled paper bags. This option would also increase cost to retailers and/or customers as customers shift to paper bags.
3. Expand current policy to include all retailers and require a five-cent charge on paper bags:
  - PRO: Promotes use of reusable bags, decreases consumption of single use bags and decreases consumption of recycled paper bags. This option would also offset the increased cost to retailers.
  - CON: Five-cent cost for customers who do not bring their own bag.

