

*To keep plastic pollution out of our creeks and Bay,*

# Starting **July 1, 2013** at all Retail Establishments



## What is Palo Alto's Bag Ordinance?

**Starting July 1, 2013, retail establishments** (including grocery stores covered under Palo Alto's 2009 Bag Ordinance) may no longer distribute single-use plastic checkout bags and must charge a minimum of ten cents for paper or reusable bags distributed at point of sale. Product bags as defined in the ordinance used to carry produce, bulk items, meat, etc. to the checkout stand, or used to protect merchandise from getting damaged (such as paper bags around individual wine bottles) can be used although reusable options are encouraged and are available for sale in many locations.

**Retailers are encouraged to read the ordinance to ensure compliance.**

**Starting November 1, 2013, food service establishments** selling food or beverages for public consumption—including those located in retail establishments—cannot distribute single-use plastic checkout bags. Paper bags can be provided to customers at no charge and reusable bags can be used at the discretion of each establishment. Individual product bags without handles may be used around containers of soups or stews to prevent spilling.

## Why is the city of Palo Alto restricting single-use plastic carryout bags?

The Ordinance seeks to encourage customers to use long-lasting reusable bags. Plastic bags are one of the most common litter items found in creek and roadside cleanups and the impacts of plastic pollution on marine life are well documented. The average single-use plastic bag is made from nonrenewable natural resources but is

used for only 12 minutes before disposal in a landfill or becoming pollution and recycling options are limited. A sturdy reusable bag can replace hundreds of single-use bags and the success of similar bag ordinances has been shown in cities and countries around the world.

While paper bags are recyclable they use resources as part of their manufacture, disposal or recycling and so their use is discouraged over the benefits of reusable bags.

## Why can't we just do more to recycle plastic bags?

Despite years of outreach and curbside and in-store recycling programs, less than 5% of single use plastic bags are recycled state-wide. In addition, plastic bags are not infinitely recyclable like glass or metal. They are currently usually made into plastic lumber and similar products for which markets are poor after their useful life has ended.

## What am I required to do?

1. **Discontinue distribution** of single-use plastic checkout bags at point of sale effective July 1, 2013.
2. **Charge a minimum of ten cents** for paper or reusable bags.
3. **Customer receipts must show** the charge for paper or reusable bags.
4. **Ensure that paper or reusable bags** that are distributed at checkout stands meet ordinance requirements. See resources for compliant bags at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags).
5. **Keep records of paper and reusable bag sales** for three years and make them available to the City upon request to ensure ordinance compliance. See the Resources section on the City's website at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags).

## How do I find bags that meet the standards for reusable and paper bags as listed in the ordinance?

See the Resources section on the City's website at [www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags](http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/bags).

## Who retains the minimum mandatory ten cent charge for paper or reusable bags?

The store retains the charge entirely to offset the costs of paper and reusable bags. The charge is not subject to tax per the California State Board of Equalization.

## Will the charge for paper bags increase from 10 cents?

Council may opt to increase the store charge if ordinance goals related to the charge are not being met. This option will be evaluated after the ordinance has been in effect for several months.

## What about farmers' markets?

Reusable bags are encouraged for use at farmers' markets, but vendors may provide product bags (such as paper or plastic produce bags) to hold produce and bulk items.

Charges for these bags are not required at farmers' markets unless checkout bags used to hold produce or product bags are provided.



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## Which customers are exempt from bag charges?

Customers participating in the California Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children, in CalFresh, or in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP—formerly food stamps) programs are exempt from the bag charge until July 1, 2014 and can receive a free reusable bag by calling Public Works—Watershed Protection at 650.329.2598. Low-income residents will be able to avoid all bag costs by bringing their own bags to the store.

## Can I still recycle my unused plastic checkout bags?

Yes, plastic bags may be recycled in your recycling container. Please consolidate bags inside one clear plastic bag and knot the top of the bag. For larger amounts (e.g., a pallet of bags) please contact GreenWaste of Palo Alto at 650.493.4894 to arrange for a special pick up.

## Does Palo Alto's ordinance apply to retail and food service establishments within the unincorporated area of Stanford?

Stanford is part of an unincorporated area of Santa Clara County which has its own ordinance. The Stanford Shopping Center is within Palo Alto City boundaries and must comply with the Palo Alto Ordinance.

## What happens to stores that are not in compliance with the ordinance?

Stores and food service establishments that fail to comply with any elements of the ordinance are subject to an infraction fine of \$250 per violation.

## What outreach materials are available?

Posters, FAQs, register placards and other information are available online or by calling Public Works—Watershed Protection at 650.329.2598.

## Suggested ideas to educate checkout staff:

1. **Share this FAQ list** with staff who work at checkout stands.
2. **Ask staff to thank customers** who have brought their own bag.
3. **Have checkout staff ask customers** if they brought their own bag or want to purchase a paper or reusable bag.

