

## **FAQs: Plastic Carryout Bag Ban and At-Store Recycling Program Consumer**

### **Q: When does the plastic carryout bag ban start?**

A: The Delaware General Assembly passed this law in 2019. The ban goes into effect Jan. 1, 2021.

### **Q: What is the benefit of banning plastic carryout bags?**

A: The change is designed to reduce beach and roadside litter, save landfill space, increase recycling efforts and help recycling facilities from having to shut down when plastic bags get stuck in the machinery. Each Delawarean uses about 434 plastic bags and that means nearly 2,400 tons of plastic bags from Delaware end up in landfills annually. A decrease by the public of plastic carryout bags can mitigate a large portion of this waste, and help our environment by reducing the amount of unsightly plastic bags on our roads and waterways that can harm us and our wildlife

### **Q: Which stores are affected by the change?**

A: Not all stores are affected by the change. Under the law, plastic carryout bags will no longer be available from larger stores (over 7,000 square feet) as well as smaller stores with at least three locations in Delaware of 3,000 square feet each. So supermarkets and big-box stores are affected, as well as chains of convenience stores. Restaurants are not subject to the ban, nor are small stores with one or two locations.

### **Q: What will these stores be providing me instead?**

A: It will be up to the stores, but they could choose to provide paper bags, or cloth bags, or a thicker type of plastic bag that is designed to be reusable. Or stores could decide (as they always could have previously) not to provide bags to customers at all.

### **Q: Does this mean my meat and fruit are loose in my bag?**

A: No. Several specific bags used within grocery stores, including those used for bulk items such as fruits/vegetables as well as bags used to cover meat, can continue to be used.

### **Q: Why am I still receiving a plastic bag at a store during checkout if they are banned?**

A: As defined by the Delaware General Assembly, a plastic carryout bag is one that is provided by a store to a customer at the point of sale made from plastic and is not specifically designed and manufactured to be reusable. There are some thicker plastic bags than the ones you are used to that are intended to be reusable and are acceptable under the new law. If you're receiving a thicker plastic film bag at a store checkout now, that bag is intended to be reusable, and you can clean/disinfect it to use again.

### **Q: My store replaced their plastic bags with paper bags. Are they allowed to do this?**

A: Yes. This law only affects plastic carryout bags and provides guidance on how they need to be replaced with reusable bags that meet specific criteria. Paper bags were not affected by this legislation and are an acceptable alternative for plastic carryout bags. Paper bags that are no longer reusable can be recycled in your curbside recycling cart. Reuse paper bags like how you would reuse other bags.

**Q: Can my store provide me a bag that has already been used?**

A: No. This law calls for plastic carryout bags to be replaced with reusable bags that customers can bring back to stores to reuse. The bags provided by the retail store should be new and not reused.

**Q: Will the stores need to bag my purchases differently under this law?**

A: No. The new reusable bags are larger than traditional plastic carryout bags and more durable, holding heavier amounts. Customers should be able to leave the store with fewer bags holding the same number of items. Since the bags available at checkout can be used for all the items that a plastic carryout bag can be used for, there should be no impact on how store employees bag merchandise.

**Q: I reuse my plastic carryout bags for other things! What am I going to do now?**

A: The new reusable bags that retail stores may be providing can be used for everything your old plastic carryout bags were used for. The only potential change you'll see is the quantity of these bags on-hand, since due to their larger size, you should be taking less home. Similarly, not all retail stores are covered by this law, so there will be plastic carryout bags available from certain retailers within the state.

**Q: Will my store allow me to bring in reusable cloth or plastic bags? Some stores have stopped this practice.**

A: DNREC is encouraging all of the stores in Delaware to consider allowing customers to use reusable bags and follow best practices in doing so. For example, customers may bag their own items (so employees don't come in contact with the bags) and employees should sanitize the checkout area after the bags are removed as per their sanitizing policy. Based on DNREC's review of studies and practices encouraged by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, these steps help maximize everyone's safety while supporting reusable bags. That said, it is up to individual stores/companies to allow reusable bags.

**Q: I've heard that reusable bags can spread disease? Should I be concerned?**

A: DNREC encourages all customers to turn their reusable plastic bags inside out when they get home, wipe them down with a disinfecting wipe and reuse them on future trips to the store. Several studies have shown that reusable bags, which were not cleaned or sanitized, have the potential to spread disease. However, these same studies concluded that washing bags in the laundry or disinfecting them with a cleaning wipe removed 99% of the things which could cause disease.

**Q: What do I do with these bags if I can't reuse them anymore or I just want to get rid of them?**

A: All the retail stores affected by this law are also required to provide an At-Store Recycling program for plastic bags and film. This drop-off location should be visible and accessible within the store. They are typically at the entrance or by the customer service area within each location. All of the bags you can't reuse anymore as well as those you don't want should be recycled at these locations. Plastic bags CANNOT go into your curbside recycling cart and should be returned to stores.

**Q: My store doesn't have an At-Store Plastic Bag Recycling program? Why?**

A: There may be several reasons. If the retail store is not affected by the law, they are not required to have an At-Store Recycling program. Similarly, if that retail store no longer provides plastic bags, including the exempt bags, they are not required to have a program to collect bags from consumers. If you're concerned that a retail store should be participating, please contact DNREC at 302-739-9403 or [recycle@delaware.gov](mailto:recycle@delaware.gov), and an inspection of that store will be conducted.

**Q: Will stores charge me a fee for reusable bags they provide at checkout?**

A: The law allows retail stores to charge a fee for the bags they provide at point of sale, but does not require it.

**Q. How do I learn more and stay updated on this topic?**

A: Visit [de.gov/recycling](http://de.gov/recycling) for more information. Follow [DNREC](#) and [Delaware Recycles](#) for the latest updates.