



FAQs

for Consumers: Plastic Carryout Bag Ban and At-Store Recycling Program

Q: When does the UPDATED plastic carryout bag ban start?

A: **July 1, 2022.** The Delaware General Assembly passed this law in June 2021.

Q: Which stores are affected by the UPDATED plastic carryout bag ban?

A: **All retail stores in Delaware** are affected by the change. Restaurants are not subject to the ban.

Q. What will these stores be providing me instead?

A: DNREC encourages customers to bring their own bag into stores so they have the bag they prefer to use. It is up to individual stores to decide what type of bag they will offer. They may offer reusable bags, paper bags or they may decide not to provide bags for customers at all. Plastic film bags, regardless of thickness, are no longer allowed.

Q: If I'm using my own bags, what should I do?

A: DNREC encourages customers to bring their own reusable bags when shopping and follow best practices in doing so. For example, customers may bag their items so employees don't come in contact with the bags, and employees should sanitize the checkout area as per their sanitizing policy. Remember to clean your empty bags at home between shopping trips. 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.

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

A: No. Several specific plastic 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 provided by stores.

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 as you would reuse other bags.

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: 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 or paper 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. Reusable bags tend to be larger than single use plastic carryout bags, so customers should be able to leave the store with fewer bags. 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'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: How do I get rid of my current supply of plastic film bags?

A: **Plastic carryout bags CANNOT go into your curbside recycling cart at home.** Instead, return them to the stores to be recycled. Retail stores that offer exempt plastic film bags to consumers for bulk items such as fruits/vegetables as well as bags used to cover meat – which are still allowed by this law – will still be required to provide an At-Store Recycling program for plastic bags and film. The drop-off location should be visible and accessible within the store. Plastic bag and film recycling containers are typically located near the entrance or by the customer service. All plastic bags and film you cannot reuse anymore should be recycled at these locations.

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

A: 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, and an inspection of that store will be conducted.

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 a year, and that means nearly 2,400 tons of plastic bags from Delaware end up in landfills annually. By decreasing the number of plastic carryout bags the public uses, a large portion of this plastic waste can be mitigated. This directly helps our environment by reducing the amount of unsightly plastic bags on our roads and waterways that can harm us and our wildlife. Paper bags, which are more sustainable, can be recycled by placing them in your curbside recycling cart at home.

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

A: Visit de.gov/bags for more information. Follow [@DelawareDNREC](https://twitter.com/DelawareDNREC) and [Delaware Recycles](https://www.facebook.com/DelawareRecycles) on social media for the latest updates.