

# Prince George's County's Better Bag Bill

What municipalities need  
to know and  
how they can help

November 15, 2023



*Photo: Rich Carey/Shutterstock*

# The Problem

- **The world is facing a plastic pollution crisis:** *Oceans take in 5-13 million tons of plastic from land-based sources annually.*
- **Plastic carryout bags are a major contributor:**
  - *County residents use an estimated **353 million plastic bags/year**,*
  - *At grocery stores in Prince George's County that offer complimentary plastic shopping bags, **88%** of shoppers take them. **Only 6% bring a reusable bag***
- **They pollute our waterways, threaten wildlife and human health:**
  - *Littered bags end up in waterways, break into microplastics, absorb toxins*
  - *Ingested by marine life, injuring & killing fish, seabirds, marine mammals*
  - *Potential health effects on humans*



# The Problem (continued)

- **Plastic carryout bags are manufactured from natural gas, contributing to climate impacts.** *Greenhouse gases are emitted at every stage of the plastic lifecycle, from production to disposal.*
- **Few plastic carryout bags are recycled.** *They are not accepted in curbside recycling programs because they foul the machinery and are too contaminated to be marketed.*
- **They are preventable single-use waste.** *The County's Climate Action Plan aims to reduce waste in the landfill and to eliminate single-use plastics..*



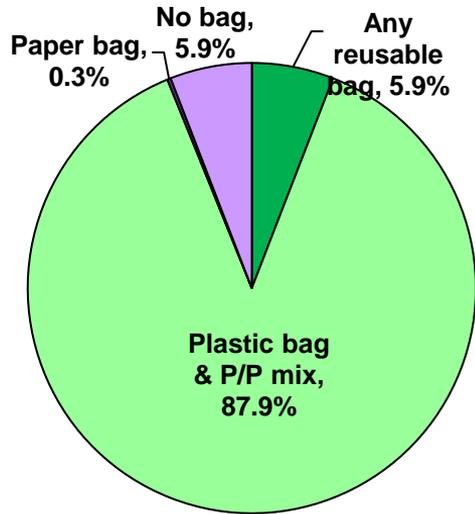
PGC recycling facility fouled with plastic film



Greenbelt litter clean-up volunteers

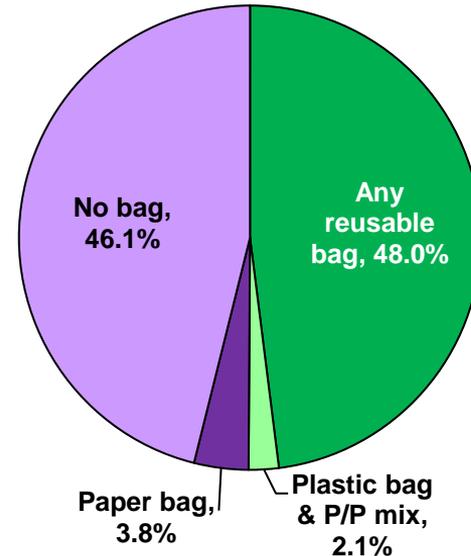
# Shoppers' bag choices in Prince George's County, 2019

**Stores that offer "free" carryout bags**



**Food Lion, Giant, Harris Teeter, Safeway, Shoppers, Wegmans, Weis Market**  
(48 stores, 7,694 shoppers)

**Stores that don't offer plastic carryout bags, charge for paper and others**



**Aldi & Lidl**  
(13 stores, 1,550 shoppers)

# The objectives of the Better Bag Bill (CB-32-2023)

- Reduce plastic pollution and single-use waste
- Incentivize shoppers to bring their own bag or not take one at all



# What residents need to know

- **Beginning on January 1, 2024, retail establishments (stores, restaurants) may not provide a plastic carryout bag to a customer unless it is reusable.**
  - A carryout bag is a bag provided at the point of sale.
  - A reusable bag is a bag with stitched handles that is specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse and made of:
    - Cloth or other washable fabric, OR
    - A durable material suitable for multiple reuse that is not plastic film.
- **Retail establishments must charge and retain at least 10 cents for a paper or reusable carryout bag.**



**It's time to bring your own bag!**

# Which carryout bags can be provided?

**Paper bags and reusable bags**  
(stitched handles, not film plastic)

Stitched handles

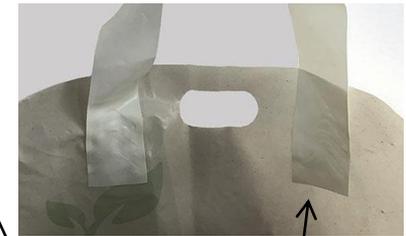


# Which carryout bags cannot be provided?

## Single-use plastic carryout bags:

(Film plastic bags do not have stitched handles, and are not reusable as defined in the bill.)

Cut-out handles →



Fused or glued handles

# Which carryout bags cannot be provided? (cont)



↑  
Fused, not stitched handles

“Compostable” plastic bags



# What businesses need to know

- **Which businesses are affected?** Retail stores, restaurants, grocery stores, or other establishments that provide single-use plastic bags to their customers due to the sale of a product or service, whether for profit or not-for-profit.
- **What else must a business do?**
  - **Post a notice at the public entrance or points of sale**, in English and Spanish, advising customers to bring their own bag or skip the bag, and that all carryout bags provided by the retailer are subject to a charge.
  - **Record the number of paper or reusable bags and the amount charged** on the transaction receipt.
  - **May offer free reusable bags one week/year**, identified by the County.
- **Exemptions from the paper bag charge:** Paper bags with prescription drugs, at drive-thru windows, and for leftovers at restaurants.

# Frequently asked questions

## Why charge for paper and other carryout bags?

- *It's an incentive for shoppers to switch to reusable bags or no bag, instead of paper bags, another source of single-use waste. In grocery chains that charge for carryout bags, >90% of customers bring a bag or use no bag.*
- *It promotes transparency – the cost of providing bags will not be subsidized by customers who bring their own bags or do not need a bag.*
- *The manufacture of paper bags results in millions of trees being felled each year and involves toxic polluting chemicals, health impacts on nearby communities.*

# Frequently asked questions (cont)

## How can low-income shoppers participate?

*The goal is universal behavior change! Ensure that all shoppers are aware of the policy and reusable bags are available to low-income shoppers. Everyone can avoid having to purchase a bag by bringing their own bag or not using a bag at all.*

## Are there any restrictions on the carryout bags that I can bring to the store?

*No. Shoppers may bring any carryout bag with them, including bags that the retail establishments no longer provide. The restrictions in the bill apply only to carryout bags that can be provided by the retail establishment.*

# Frequently asked questions (cont)

## Are there any exceptions to the plastic carryout bag ban?

*The following plastic bags are not provided at the point of sale, and thus not prohibited. Plastic bags used to:*

- Package bulk items, including fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains, candy, or small hardware items;
- Contain or wrap frozen foods, meat, or fish, whether prepackaged or not;
- Contain or wrap flowers, potted plants, or other damp items;
- Contain unwrapped prepared foods or bakery goods;
- Protect suits, dresses, and formal wear, and bags used to protect dry cleaning; or
- Take live fish, insects, mollusks, or crustaceans away from the retail establishment.

# What other Maryland jurisdictions have plastic bag bills?

Policy	Jurisdiction (year of effectiveness)	Amt of charge/tax*
Tax on plastic & paper carryout bags	Montgomery County (2012)	5¢ tax
Tax on plastic carryout bags	Howard County (2020)	5¢ tax
Ban on plastic carryout bags	Chestertown (2012) Takoma Park (2016) Westminster (July 2021) Laurel (January 2022) <b>Frederick City (January 1, 2024)</b>	N/A
“Hybrid” - Ban on plastic carryout bags, tax or charge (retained by the store) on other bags	City of Baltimore (October 2021)	5¢ tax
	<b>Baltimore County (November 1, 2023)</b>	Minimum 5¢ charge
	<b>Easton (April 2, 2023)</b> <b>Salisbury (July 1, 2023)</b> <b>College Park (September 1, 2023)</b> <b>Centreville (January 1, 2024)</b> <b>Greenbelt (January 1, 2024)</b> <b>Laurel (January 1, 2024)</b> <b>Anne Arundel County (January 1, 2024)</b> <b>Prince George’s County (January 1, 2024)</b>	Minimum 10¢ charge

# For more information

- **County website for Bag It Right!**  
[mypgc.us/bagitright](https://mypgc.us/bagitright)
- **Link to CB-32-2023**  
<https://www.sierraclub.org/sites/www.sierraclub.org/files/2023-07/B2023032%20-%20Draft%204%20%28final%29.pdf>
- **Speakers:**
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  - **Ryna Quiñones:** [rquinones@collegeparkmd.gov](mailto:rquinones@collegeparkmd.gov)
- **Prince George's County Sierra Club Zero Waste website:**  
<https://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/prince-georges/zero-waste>
- **Sustainable Maryland:** <https://sustainablemaryland.com>