

# **Steamboat Springs single-use plastic bag ban and paper bag fee**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

Under City of Steamboat Springs Ordinance 2699, large markets in the City of Steamboat Springs will no longer provide single-use plastic carryout bags and will charge a 20-cent fee for paper bags.

**Here are some Frequently Asked Questions about the plastic bag ban and paper bag fee:**

**When do the single-use plastic bag ban and paper bag fee go into effect?**

October 1, 2019.

**What stores are covered under the ordinance?**

The ordinance covers markets of 10,000 square feet or larger within Steamboat Springs. This includes City Market, Safeway, Walmart, Walgreens and Natural Grocers. Other retailers may choose to "opt-in."

**Why is there a 20-cent charge for paper bags?**

The 20-cent charge encourages the use of reusable bags and will be utilized to reduce waste and enhance recycling in Steamboat Springs.

**Is the 20-cent charge on paper a tax?**

No. You can avoid the charge completely by bringing your own bags and refusing to buy paper bags offered by the stores. In addition, according to the ordinance, a retailer may provide a paper bag to a customer at no charge if the customer provides evidence that he or she is a participant in a Colorado Food Assistance Program.

**Does the ordinance ban plastic produce or meat/seafood bags?**

No. Stores will still provide plastic bags for produce and meat/seafood as they have done in the past.

**How will I carry my groceries home? I need those "free" bags.**

We encourage you to bring your own reusable bags to avoid having to buy a paper bag at the store. If you forget, you can choose to go without a bag or purchase a paper or reusable bag in the store.

**What if I forget my reusable bags?**

Getting used to new habits takes a little time and practice. Some stores have already put up reminder signs to help customers get used to bringing their own bags. Keep your reusable bags in the car, in your purse, or you can invest in a small, collapsible bag that attaches to your keychain for shopping trips. After you unpack your groceries at home, hang your grocery bags by the door or by your keys, so you remember to take them with you. If you forget your reusable bags (at home or in your car), put your groceries back in your cart after you check out and take them to your car to unload.

### **Aren't reusable bags worse for the environment?**

This issue is complicated and depends on the material of the bag and how it is manufactured. In general, reusable bags with higher recycled content have less of an environmental footprint, but the key to reducing the environmental impact of any bag is to use it multiple times and dispose of it properly when it has worn out.

### **Why charge for paper bags? Aren't they better than plastic?**

Even though paper is made from a renewable resource and is recycled at a higher rate, these single-use bags still have an environmental impact of their own. The 20-cent charge serves an environmental and economic purpose. The charge incentivizes the use of reusable bags and reduces single-use paper bag waste and associated environmental impacts. The charge also will fund additional waste reduction and recycling activities in Steamboat Springs.

### **How will I pick up my pet's waste, throw away dirty diapers, or line my small trash cans now?**

Look for creative reuses for the unavoidable plastic bags you will likely still have around, such as produce, bread and tortilla bags. For trash cans, try using an unlined trash bin that you rinse out periodically. You can also purchase a waterproof, washable cloth can liner, sometimes sold as diaper pail liners.

### **What about recycling; isn't that a better solution?**

Reduction of plastic is best, and reuse is second best. The average American family takes home almost 1,500 plastic shopping bags a year. In Steamboat Springs, more than 3.8 million single-use plastic bags are used each year by shoppers at the five stores included in the ban. According to Waste Management, in the U.S., [only 1% of plastic bags are returned for recycling](#), the rest end up in landfills or as litter.

### **Will reusable bags make me sick?**

There are no credible studies making a connection between reusable bags and foodborne illness. To eliminate risk of illness, follow common sense and clean your bags when they get dirty.

### **What does the city plan to do with the revenue from the paper bag fee?**

Funding from the fee will be used to provide residents and visitors with reusable bags; educate residents, businesses, and visitors about the impact of trash on the City's environmental health; and fund programs and infrastructure that will increase waste reduction and diversion in Steamboat Springs.

### **What about visitors who might not bring their own bags?**

Several property managers provide free reusable bags to their guests. Visitors can also purchase reusable bags, pay the 20-cent fee for paper bags or go without. Yampa Valley Sustainability Council is working with community partners to develop a bag bank program where people can borrow bags. More information on the bag bank program is coming soon.