

# Rhode Island Plastic Waste Reduction Act (Bag Ban)

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



### **Q: What does the ban do?**

The ban prohibits retailers from offering single-use plastic bags at the checkout counter. The ban seeks to curb litter in the streets, reduce contamination of the City's recycling system, and protect our waterways and marine environment, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.


### **Q: How do I know if I'm considered a "retailer"?**

Retail sales establishment means any licensed enterprise where the sale or transfer to a customer of goods in exchange for payment occurs in a retail store, flea market, restaurant, or other food service establishment. Retail sales establishments do not include farmers' markets, bazaars or festivals operated by nonprofit or religious institutions, yard sales, tag sales, or other sales by residents at their homes. This includes (but is not limited to) restaurants, pharmacies, convenience and grocery stores, liquor stores, jewelry stores, and household goods stores.

### **Q: What can retailers offer instead?**

If any retail establishment provides a checkout bag to customers, the bag shall comply with the requirements of being a Reusable Bag or a Recyclable Paper Bag.

- Reusable Bag: a bag with handles that are stitched and is specifically designed and manufactured for one hundred twenty-five (125) or more reuses, and is made primarily of washable cloth, other durable woven or nonwoven fabric, polyester, polypropylene, or other durable plastic with a minimum thickness of four (4.0) mils.
- Recyclable Paper Bag: a paper bag that is one hundred percent (100%) recyclable including the handles, contains at least forty percent (40%) post-consumer paper content, and displays the words "Recyclable" and the percentage of post-consumer paper content in a visible manner on the outside of the bag. The term "recyclable paper bag" does not include paper carryout bags at restaurants.



**Q: Can I offer thicker plastic bags? What if they are specifically labeled as “recyclable” and/or “reusable”?**

No. A thicker plastic bag or a label on the bag isn’t necessarily enough. Any plastic retail checkout bag must meet the standards listed in the question above.

**Q: Can I offer “biodegradable” or “compostable” bags?**

No. Most bags that claim to be “biodegradable” or “compostable” only break-down in certain temperatures and with special processes. If not disposed of properly, these bags can still cause harm to wildlife and have a negative impact on the environment.

**Q: What about produce bags and other plastic bags?**

Bags used to hold and transport loose items like produce, bulk foods, or small hardware items are exempt, as are bags used to contain frozen foods, meat or fish, and flowers or potted plants, bags used to contain unwrapped prepared foods or bakery goods, newspaper bags, door-hanger bags, laundry or dry cleaning bags, bags sold in packages containing multiple bags (e.g. garbage or pet waste bags), bags used to contain live animals from pet stores, and bags to transport partially consumed bottles of wine.

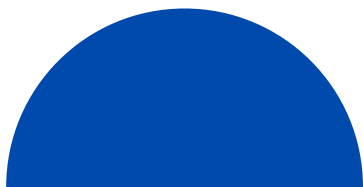
**Q: Has COVID-19 changed the bag law?**

No. The Retail Plastic Bag Reduction Act is still in place.

**Q: Can I use reusable bags during COVID-19?**

A statement from over 100 health experts noted that available evidence indicates that the virus spreads primarily from inhaling aerosolized droplets, rather than through contact with surfaces. Further, single-use plastic is not inherently safer than reusables, with studies showing that COVID-19 can remain infectious on surfaces including plastic.

We recommend that customers self-bag when reusable bags are used at checkout. We also recommend that customers regularly clean their reusable bags (as with all surfaces) to kill the virus and protect themselves and others. See these guidelines on how to wash different types of reusable bags: For more information on the local response to COVID-19, resources or operational changes, residents can visit [www.providenceri.gov/pema/covid-19-resources/](http://www.providenceri.gov/pema/covid-19-resources/). Residents may also call to connect to the Mayor’s Center for City Services by dialing 3-1-1, visiting [www.PVD311.com](http://www.PVD311.com) or downloading the PVD311 mobile app on your smartphone for 24/7 access.





**Q: Are there exemptions?**

No. The Rhode Island Plastic Bag Ban is in effect and all retail sales establishments are required to comply.

**Q: What happens if a retailer continues to offer single-use plastic bags at the counter?**

Retail establishments found in violation of Rhode Island's Retail Plastic Bag Ban will be issued a warning notice. Each violation that occurs after the issuance of a warning notice will impose a penalty against the retail establishment. The penalty for each violation that occurs (after the issuance of a warning notice) shall be:

- **\$100 for the first violation.**
- **\$200 for the second violation.**
- **\$500 for the third and any subsequent violations.**

Payment of such fines may be enforced through civil action in the City Municipal Court.

