

FAQs

What bags do I have to charge a fee for?

Retailers will be required to charge a minimum of 5 cents for each plastic retail shopping bag that customers take. A plastic retail shopping bag is a bag made of plastic film, designed to carry customer purchases from a retail business establishment.

Does the fee apply to all plastic retail shopping bags, despite size or quantity?

The fee is applied to all plastic retail shopping bags regardless of size or quantity. The requirement to charge a **fee does not apply to the following plastic bags:**

- bags used by customers inside retail business establishments to package bulk items such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains, candy or small hardware items such as nails and bolts;
- bags used to contain or wrap frozen foods, meat or fish, flowers or potted plants, whether pre-packaged or not;
- bags used to protect prepared foods or bakery goods;
- bags provided by pharmacists to contain prescription drugs;
- newspaper bags;
- door-hanger bags;
- laundry-dry cleaning bags
- bags sold in packages containing multiple bags intended for such uses as garbage bags, pet waste bags, yard waste bags, or recycling bags.

Can a retailer absorb the 5 cent fee instead of passing it on to the consumer?

(As a retailer, can I pay the 5 cent fee as a courtesy to my customers?)

The by-law requires all retailers to charge a minimum of \$0.05 per bag to the customer. The 5 cent charge per bag cannot be absorbed by retailers into the cost of the purchase.

What should I do with the money from the sale of plastic bags?

The funds generated from the sale of plastic retail shopping bags are not remitted to the City of Toronto. Each retailer may choose what they would like to do with the money from the sale of plastic retail shopping bags.

In passing this policy in December 2008, Toronto City Council encouraged retailers to reinvest any revenue from the sale of plastic retail shopping bags into community or environmental initiatives, and encourages retailers to let their customers know what they are doing with the funds.

Where does this bylaw apply?

This by-law applies to retailers and retail locations within the City of Toronto. A map of the boundaries of the City of Toronto: <http://app.toronto.ca/wards/jsp/wards.jsp>

All of the wards indicated on the map are within the City of Toronto. In 1998 the former municipalities of Etobicoke, York, North York, East York, Toronto and Scarborough amalgamated as “the City of Toronto”. All of those former areas are now considered Toronto.

Is the plastic bag fee subject to GST and/or PST?

It is the responsibility of the retailer to ensure they are complying with their obligations under Federal and Provincial tax law.

The Ontario Ministry of Revenue has provided some guidance to retailers on how to apply the Provincial Sales Tax (PST) to purchases which include plastic retail shopping bags: <http://www.rev.gov.on.ca/english/taxtips/rst/06.html>

Does the fee apply to paper bags?

The requirement to charge a fee does not apply to paper bags.

If the customer returns their purchase along with the bag, will the 5 cent fee have to be returned as well?

That decision will have to be made by each retailer as part of their store’s return policy. The bylaw does not describe that situation.

Signage and Receipts:

What kind of signs should I put up?

The City of Toronto has produced signage for retailers to display at the point-of-sale to inform customers of the charge on plastic retail shopping bags.

Print quality PDFs of the City signs can be found here:

- [Poster size](#)
- [Postcard size](#)
- [Sticker size](#)

Additionally, you can pick up printed copies of these posters, signs and stickers at various City sites as of May 15. These locations will be communicated to retailers and noted on the City’s website as of May 15.

I would like to make my own sign for my customers. What should the sign say?

Retailers may make their own signs to post at the point-of-sale.

The sign should indicate the amount per-plastic bag that is being charged (e.g., a minimum of 5 cents).

You may make reference to the **City of Toronto Municipal Code Chapter 604, Packaging** to let your customers know that you are complying with a City of Toronto bylaw.

If a retailer chooses to make their own sign for customers, they will still be required to post at least one of the official City signs mentioned above.

Do retailers have to communicate the charge by both printing in on the receipt showing a sign, or is it one or the other?

The text of Municipal Code Chapter 604, Packaging, states that regarding signage and receipt:

1. prominent signage of the City's requirement to impose the charge on customers at the point-of-sale; and
2. indicate on the customer receipt, if one is issued, the number of plastic retail shopping bags used by the customer and the total amount charged.”

If a retailer issues a receipt they will have to indicate the charge for each plastic bag on the receipt. “Prominent signage” will be required regardless of whether a receipt is issued.

Are there any special requirements on what to say on receipts?

The charge for each plastic bag should appear on the customer receipt just like any other purchase from the store. There are no special requirements for the wording to use on the receipt, but a customer should be able to identify on their receipt that they have purchased plastic retail shopping bags.

Ban on Bags Not Compatible with City of Toronto Blue Bin Program:

What bags will be banned by the City of Toronto as of June 1, 2010?

Plastic retail shopping bags made of biodegradable or compostable plastic, or plastic retail shopping bags that have metal fittings (e.g., eyelets, grommets) or other non-plastic components (e.g., string, cord, cardboard) will be banned for sale or distribution by retailers as of June 1, 2010.

Why is the City banning biodegradable or compostable bags?

In December 2008, the City of Toronto allowed plastic retail shopping bags into the Blue Bin program. Recyclers use that plastic to make durable goods like plastic lumber and automotive parts. Recyclers cannot use post-consumer plastic that will degrade over time to make durable goods, and therefore the City has introduced this ban as a way of ensuring a sustainable recyclable product.

What should retailers do with their existing stock of biodegradable bags? Would it be acceptable for them to put a message or sticker on the bag that says "do not put in Blue Bin for recycling"?

Retailers can continue to use their existing stock of biodegradable plastic retail shopping bags until June 1, 2010. It would be very helpful, and factual, for retailers to indicate to their customers that the biodegradable plastic retail shopping bags are not acceptable in Toronto's Blue Bin recycling program and should be disposed of in the garbage. City will continue to instruct residents that biodegradable bags are not permitted in the Blue Bin recycling program.

What acceptable alternatives should retailers consider moving to, paper bags?

The intent of the policy to impose a charge for plastic bags is simply for residents to reduce the use of plastic retail shopping bags. Ideally, bags that residents use to carry their purchases should either be reusable or able to be recycled in the City of Toronto residential Blue Bin program. Paper is also acceptable in the Blue Bin program, meaning paper shopping bags could be an acceptable alternative, but there is no real need for a shift to paper bags. The focus should not be on another kind of single-use disposable bag, but should rather be on promoting the use of durable reusable bags.

Reusable Bags

What constitutes a reusable bag? Can there be special considerations for specialty retailers whose bags are part of their trademark and are typically reused?

The Municipal Code Chapter 604, Packaging, states that a reusable container is: "Other than a plastic retail shopping bag, a bag, box or other container that is specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse and is:

- made of cloth or other machine washable fabric; or
- made of other durable material suitable for reuse.

While we appreciate that plastic retail shopping bags can be reused for things like kitchen garbage bags, lining kitchen catchers used to collect organics that are put into the Green Bin or lining the actual Green Bin, and picking up pet waste, the purpose of those bags are for single-use.

What does the Municipal Code say a retailer must do with a customer's reusable bags?

The Municipal Code Chapter 604, Packaging, says that a retailer must accept the use of any customer's container in lieu of a plastic retail shopping bag. This means that a retailer may not refuse customers bringing/using a reusable container or "force" a customer to buy a plastic retail shopping bag, if they didn't want one. There is no requirement for a retailer to have their staff physically fill the reusable container, if that is not store policy.

Plastic Bag Reduction Target

How will the above communication requirements tie into the provincial voluntary agreement to reduce plastic bag use by 50% by 2102?

The two goals (Toronto's and the Province's) work together. Progress towards the Provincial goal of 50% bag reduction is also progress towards Toronto's goal of 70% bag reduction.

How does this impact the voluntary Ontario 50% reduction plan?

As mentioned above, this policy works in concert with the provincial reduction plan. Retailers' agreement with the province to reduce plastic bag use also counts towards Toronto's policy.