



BAN SINGLE-USE PLASTIC CARRYOUT BAGS

House Bill 314 | Senate Bill 223

DID YOU KNOW?

The world is facing a plastic pollution crisis. Every year, our oceans take in an estimated 15 million tons of plastic.¹ On our present course, there will be more plastic than fish (by weight) in the oceans by 2050.²

Worldwide, shoppers use each year an estimated 1 trillion plastic shopping bags.³ These bags are among the top five plastic products collected in beach cleanups in the U.S.⁴ At major grocery chains in Maryland that provide carryout bags, 75% to 92% of shoppers use single-use bags, nearly all of them plastic.⁵ These bags have about a 15-minute “working life,” but last for centuries or more.

Plastic bags pollute our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife and human health.

- Littered plastic bags end up in waterways and the oceans, where they degrade into small pieces, absorbing toxic chemicals.
- Whether intact or as microplastic particles, plastic shopping bags are ingested by marine life, injuring and killing fish, seabirds, and marine mammals. On land, plastic bag litter is a lethal threat to livestock and wildlife.
- According to scientists, we may be ingesting up to a credit card’s worth of plastic *every week*.⁶ The potential health effects on humans of plastic particles, their additives, and the toxins they absorb from the environment are of great concern.



Plastic bag ban and fee laws change shopper behavior and reduce plastic pollution. Ten states and nearly 500 localities in the U.S. have enacted bag laws, including neighboring Delaware, which banned plastic carryout bags as of January 1, 2021.⁷ Montgomery County’s 5-cent fee on carryout bags has cut the percentage of shoppers using single-use plastic bags by more than half,⁸ with nearly 60% of shoppers opting for reusable bags or no bag at all. Since Howard County’s 5-cent fee on plastic carryout bags went into effect October 1, 2020, the share of shoppers using reusable bags or no bag has increased from a quarter to a half, and the share using plastic has declined from three-quarters to a third.⁹

Maryland must ban single-use plastic carryout bags statewide!

What This Bill Will Do:

- The **Plastic Bag Reduction Act** would prohibit retailers from providing plastic carryout bags to customers at point of sale as of July 1, 2022.
- It would not affect the authority of jurisdictions like the City of Baltimore or Montgomery County to collect an already-enacted fee or tax on carryout bags that are not banned.

Why Not Just Recycle Plastic Bags?

Only about 5% of plastic bags are recycled. They are not accepted in curbside recycling programs because they foul the machinery and are too contaminated to be marketed. Even if the recycling rate could be improved, it would not prevent littered plastic bags from entering the environment. The best solution is to reduce our use of single-use plastic bags by banning them statewide.

Why Not Charge for Paper Bags?

A fee on paper and other bags would serve as an additional incentive to shoppers to use a reusable bag, reducing the demand for paper bags and their environmental footprint. However, retailers have always had the power to charge for carryout bags at the checkout, just like they do for other merchandise, or not offer single-use bags at all. This would save them money, discourage paper bag use, and incentivize reusable bags. Some Maryland grocery chains already have banned plastic bags and charge for paper and reusable bags; more than 90% of their customers bring a reusable bag or use no bag at all.¹⁰ Their customers benefit from lower food prices, since the stores are not including the cost of “free” carryout bags in their overhead.

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¹Forrest, Andrew *et al.* 2019. “Eliminating Plastic Pollution: How a Voluntary Contribution from Industry Will Drive the Circular Plastics Economy.” *Frontiers in Marine Science* 6:627. 25 September 2019. “Supplemental materials.”

²<https://www.weforum.org/press/2016/01/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-ocean-by-2050-report-offers-blueprint-for-change/>.

³ Laura Parker. 2018. “Plastic: We made it. We depend on it. We’re drowning in it,” *National Geographic*, June, p. 40.

⁴ 5 Gyres Institute *et al.* Undated. “Better Alternatives Now: B.A.N. List 2.0.” Los Angeles, California.

⁵ MD Sierra Club Shopper Survey, 2019-2020. More than 40,000 shoppers at 256 grocery stores were observed in 13 counties (Calvert, Charles, Dorchester, Frederick, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, Queen Anne’s, St. Mary’s, Somerset, Washington, Wicomico, and Worcester) and the City of Baltimore.

⁶ “How to Eat Less Plastic,” *Consumer Reports*, June 2020.

⁷ CA, CT, DE, HI, ME, NJ, NY, OR, VT, WA have statewide bag laws; Source: www.PlasticBagLaws.org.

⁸ MD Sierra Club Shopper Survey, 2019-2020.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, results for Aldi and Lidl stores in Baltimore City and Howard, Frederick, Prince George’s, Wicomico, and Washington Counties.