

# FACT SHEET *for* BUSINESSES



## Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance takes effect March 1, 2013.

The City of Austin's carryout bag ordinance regulates the types of bags that businesses can provide customers at checkout and encourages a shift to reusable bags. The new rules apply to all businesses in Austin that provide carryout bags to their customers: grocery and convenience stores, department stores, restaurants, hardware stores, bookstores, local retailers and national chains.

### Some bags are exempt from the Bag Ordinance:

- Produce bags and other non-checkout bags used for bulk items, unwrapped baked goods and frozen foods.
- Dry cleaning bags.
- Packages of multiple bags intended for disposal of trash, pet waste or yard trimmings.
- Paper bags used by restaurants; single-use plastic bags are only allowed if necessary to prevent moisture damage (for soups, sauces and other liquids).
- Paper bags used by pharmacists or veterinarians for prescriptions or other medical necessities.
- Bags provided by nonprofit organizations.

### Bag Standards

Under the new ordinance, businesses can provide any of these reusable bag options at checkout:

1. **Cloth, fabric or other woven bags.**
2. **Plastic bags** that are at least 4 mil thick, with handles. ("1 mil" is .001 inch.)
3. **Paper bags** made of at least 40% recycled content, with handles. At least 80% recycled content required by March 1, 2014. Handles are not required for paper bags that are smaller than 8" wide and 14" tall.



Customers may also bring their own bags of any type from home.

### Signs must be posted inside stores and in parking lots.

Businesses are responsible for printing their own signs. Visit [BringItAustin.com](http://BringItAustin.com) for free sample signage artwork.

#### Interior Signs:

- Inform customers that, under City Code, businesses may no longer offer single-use carryout bags and that bag options are available for carrying out purchased items.
- Must be located within six feet of each point of sale.
- Must be in both English and Spanish.

#### Exterior/Parking Lot Signs:

- Must include text that reminds customers to bring reusable bags. (Example: Don't forget your reusable bag. *No olvides tu bolsa reusable.*)
- Minimum of one sign for every 50 parking spaces.
- Minimum size of 11" x 17" and readable by walking customers.
- Must be in both English and Spanish.





## Checklist for Businesses:

1. Review the bag standards and decide which types of bags to offer customers (if any).
2. Identify bag suppliers that can provide bags that meet the ordinance requirements.
3. Post signs required by the ordinance to be placed near points of sale and in your parking lot. Signs must be in English and Spanish.
4. Train your employees how to respond to customer questions. Ask employees to encourage customers to bring reusable bags.
5. Visit [BringItAustin.com](http://BringItAustin.com) or call 3-1-1 for assistance if you have questions.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is a reusable bag?

A reusable bag has handles and is made of durable materials specifically designed and manufactured for multiple reuse. The ordinance specifies that reusable plastic bags be at least 4.0 mil thick.

### I have a plastic bag that is not 4.0 mil thick but should be considered reusable. Can I provide it to customers?

You must submit a request along with a bag sample to Austin Resource Recovery for plastic carryout bags that do not meet the 4.0 mil standard. The Alternative Compliance Request form is available at [BringItAustin.com](http://BringItAustin.com). A manufacturer or a third party must certify that the alternative bag meets the standard of 100+ reuses carrying 16 pounds.

### May I charge customers for the bags provided at checkout?

You may charge customers for carryout bags that meet the ordinance's bag standards. However, the City code does not require businesses to charge a fee for the bags.

### Will the City help make shoppers aware of the new rules?

Austin Resource Recovery launched the *Bring it Austin* public education campaign to educate shoppers about the new rules and to remind them to bring reusable bags when they shop. The City is also distributing thousands of free reusable bags at locations and events throughout Austin.

### How will the City enforce the ordinance?

At first, the City will focus on outreach to businesses that need extra assistance, using penalties as a last resort for businesses that do not make a good faith effort to follow the new rules. The ordinance provides penalties of \$100 to \$2,000 per violation.

### I don't own or control my shared parking lot. Do I still need to provide exterior signage?

Businesses that lease and do not control their parking lots must post at least one 11" x 17" sign at each customer entrance. The purpose of the signage is to remind customers to bring their reusable bags before they enter the store.



## Reducing Waste

Austin's ordinance is not a ban on plastic or paper bags, but it will drastically reduce the number of thin plastic bags that generate unsightly litter, clog storm drains and creeks and can be mistaken by wildlife as food. If we all adopt reuse habits—such as bringing your own bags—we can help Austin reach Zero Waste by 2040.

## Hardship, Alternative Compliance, and Emergency Access

Affected businesses, distributors, and manufacturers may apply for Hardship, Alternative Compliance, or Emergency Access by submitting a form available at [BringItAustin.com](http://BringItAustin.com). The City has 60 days to render a decision.