

## MDI Plastic Bag Ordinance - Questions and Answers

Provided by A Climate To Thrive (ACTT)

### **Q: What will the plastic bag ordinance do?**

A: The purpose of the plastic bag ordinance is to reduce the amount of plastic waste that we create as a community. The proposed ordinance would ban the distribution of single-use plastic carryout bags at checkout counters in all businesses in the community, including supermarkets. Paper bags would be available at checkout counters, but they would carry a small fee in order to encourage the use of reusable shopping bags, which would also be for sale at checkout counters.

### **Q: What do I use when I go grocery shopping?**

A: Shoppers are encouraged to bring their own reusable bags, and inexpensive reusable bags will be available at the checkout in most businesses. Paper bags will also be available as a backup at checkouts for a 5¢ fee the first year of the ordinance, 10¢ the second year, and 15¢ from the third year on. The purpose of the fees is to discourage the consumption of all single-use carryout bags, paper or plastic, and encourage the use of reusable shopping bags.

### **Q: Aren't paper bags worse for the environment than plastic bags?**

A: Yes and no. Paper bags do take more energy to manufacture and distribute than plastic bags and have a larger carbon footprint, but they have a much shorter life cycle and biodegrade into natural materials. Plastic breaks into smaller and smaller pieces over time, but it never truly biodegrades, and the tiny pieces (microplastic) are toxic and enter our food chain, water and air, causing serious health problems. The goal of this ordinance is to reduce the use of both plastic and paper single-use carryout bags and encourage the transition to reusable shopping bags, which is why it places a fee on paper bags.

### **Q: But I recycle my plastic bags! Why do I have to follow this ordinance?**

A: Unfortunately, recycling plastic bags is not a solution. According to the Clean Air Council, less than 1% of plastic bags are recycled, and recycling one ton of plastic bags costs \$4,000 (and contributes to climate change), while the recycled product can be sold for only \$32. The best way to decrease plastic waste is to reduce plastic usage.

### **Q: I reuse my plastic bags as trash can liners, pet waste containers, etc. If plastic bags are banned, what do I use instead?**

A: This ordinance will not ban all usage of plastic bags; it only bans the distribution of them at checkout. The ordinance also does not include plastic produce bags, which can be found in many produce aisles at any grocery store, and it will not stop any establishment from selling plastic bags, some of which are now compostable. There will still be a lot of plastic left to use for lining trash cans and picking up pet waste; you will just not be able to get single-use carryout bags for free. Even if we continue to use plastic in our day-to-day lives, cutting out single-use carryout plastic bags will greatly reduce the total amount of plastic we use as a community.

**Q: Won't banning the distribution of free plastic bags make it difficult for low-income folks?**

A: No. In fact, environmental justice groups have been supporting bans because low income people are often the most impacted by the health damaging pollution from plastic manufacturing and waste. We can all make the change to bringing our own bags, especially since many reusable bag options are extremely lightweight and take up very little space, so they can be kept in handbags and backpacks. Reusable bags are abundant at thrift stores, and the Citizens Initiative for Reducing Plastics on MDI plans to make free and low cost reusable bags available in MDI towns to make the transition easier. If shoppers forget their bags, paper bags would only cost 5 cents in the first year. It's also important to note that "free" plastic carryout bags at stores are not actually free to customers. The cost is added to the price of food. The proposed ordinance should actually lower the cost of food slightly because the fee for paper bags will cover their cost.

**Q: We are a community that is heavily dependent on tourist revenue. Won't having a plastic bag ordinance be bad for the tourism industry?**

A: No. More and more, our tourists are coming from places where they have already approved plastic bag ordinances and are already in the habit of using reusable bags. These places now include Boston, Cambridge, Brookline and 78 other cities and towns in Massachusetts, and Portland, South Portland, and 12 other Maine cities and towns. This ordinance is part of a nationwide effort to clean up and protect the environment and protect our sea life and seafood from toxic microplastics. If it would have any effect on tourism here, it would be most likely be positive, since it's our beautiful protected environment, wildlife, and seafood that attract tourists. One small way tourist businesses would probably benefit is through increased sales of Acadia themed reusable bags.

**Q: How do we know this ordinance is even going to work?**

A: The number of cities, towns, states and countries that have passed ordinances to reduce or eliminate single-use plastic bags is large and growing. This includes 14 Maine cities and towns and Boston, Cambridge, Brookline and Providence. The ordinances are working well and town and city administrators say they have not been having problems with implementation and enforcement. Research is showing that these ordinances are effective in protecting the environment.

For example, a study by San Jose, California found that a 2011 ban instituted there has led to plastic litter reduction of "approximately 89 percent in the storm drain system, 60 percent in the creeks and rivers, and 59 percent in City streets and neighborhoods."  
(ScientificAmerican.com)

Charges of 5 pence (7 cents US) on supermarket carryout bags have led to an 80% drop in plastic bag use across England (9 billion fewer since the charge was implemented in 2015!), and charges in Ireland (equivalent to 17 cents US) have led to a 90% drop there. Recent results of a 25-year study by the UK government's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) shows proof that [plastic](#) pollution legislation actually works. They found 30% less plastic bags in the waters around Norway, Germany, northern France and Ireland ever since a number of European countries introduced fees on the items. (Ecowatch, The Independent & The Guardian)