

Senate Bill 8
Plastic Grocery Bag Tax Act

Article 1:

<https://thehill.com/changing-america/sustainability/4322916-plastic-bag-fees-what-to-know/>

Where do plastic bag fees go?
Sometimes it's a mystery.

By [Alejandra O'Connell-Domenech](#) | Nov. 24, 2023

This Aug. 3, 2009 photo shows a clerk bagging groceries in plastic sacks at the M Street Grocery in Seattle. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Story at a glance

- Plastic bag fees have become ubiquitous in some parts of the country amid government efforts to curb Americans' plastic consumption.
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- State and local governments determine where the money from the fees goes.
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- It is unclear how the money is being used in some cities. But in many places, the money collected from these fees is going toward environmental cleanup or distributing reusable plastic shopping bags to marginalized communities.
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Many state and local governments have implemented plastic bag fees at grocery stores in an effort to curb Americans' plastic pollution. But where does all the money from those fees actually go?

The answer differs across the various areas where fees have been put in place.

Over 100 states and localities have passed legislation mandating a fee for carryout plastic bags, according to data from the [Retail Industry Leaders Association](#).

In general, these plastic bag fees or taxes have gone to existing funds in states or municipalities that pay for environmental clean-up or conservation efforts, according to a spokesperson for the [Plastic Pollution Coalition](#), an advocacy group that works to stop plastic pollution.

For example, most of Washington, D.C.'s 5-cent single-use plastic bag fee goes toward the cleanup of local waterways.

In 2009, D.C. became [the first city](#) in the nation to pass legislation implementing single-use plastic bag and paper bag fees.

Under the legislation, the business providing the plastic bags gets to keep one cent of the five-cent fee. If the business offers a rebate for customers who bring in their own bag, they can keep two cents, according to the city's [Department of Energy and Environment](#).

Businesses are required to give the remaining money to the Office of Tax and Revenue, which is then put towards the Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Fund by the city, a spokesperson for the Department of Energy and Environment confirmed.

The Anacostia River, which runs from the city's Maryland suburbs to downtown D.C., is home to 800,000 people and dozens of species of fish and birds.

Both people and wildlife have been negatively impacted by the trash, sewage runoff, oil, metals and other pollution that has plagued the river for years, according to the [Environmental Protection Agency](#).

The water was so polluted that swimming in the river was banned for more than [50 years](#) due to safety concerns.

D.C. has collected millions of dollars since the fee was mandated. In fiscal year 2021 alone, the city collected more than \$1,946,000 in bag fees from regulated businesses, according to a [2021 Bag Law annual summary report](#).

Funds from single-use plastic bag fees are also frequently put toward plastic pollution education and the distribution of reusable bags to SNAP and WIC recipients, according to the Plastic Pollution Coalition spokesperson.

This is the case in both D.C. and Boulder, Colo.

D.C.'s Department of Energy and Environment spent over \$335,000 of Bag Law revenue in 2021 for "outreach and reusable plastic bag distribution," according to the [Bag Law annual summary](#).

Colorado mandated a statewide plastic bag fee from January 2023 until early 2024, when a [complete ban](#) on single-use plastic bags will begin.

A fee has been in place in Boulder longer than that, however: The city adopted a Disposable Bag Fee Ordinance in 2012 and has since required stores within the city to charge customers 10 cents per single-use plastic bag.

Under the ordinance, stores can keep four cents of the fee to help pay for the cost of complying with the law, and the remaining six cents are given back to the city.

"The city portion of this fee has been used to purchase reusable bags for the community and food banks, compostable bin liners for businesses, community education, and some recycling infrastructure to allow for better plastic bag recycling," a spokesperson for the City of Boulder told The Hill.

When the ordinance was first adopted, Boulder residents used about 33 million carryout plastic bags a year. After the plastic bag fee was imposed, the city saw about a 70 percent decrease in plastic bag use, according to the [city's website](#).

Since 2018, Boulder has collected about \$1,000,000 from the plastic bag fee, the website adds.

Bag fee funds can also be used for additional or broader waste reduction management, but money from this year's fees has not gone toward those efforts yet in Boulder, the spokesperson added.

In some other cities where plastic bag fees or taxes have been implemented, such as Chicago, it's unclear how the collected money is spent.

The City of Chicago has yet to respond to questions from The Hill about how money from its Checkout Bag Tax is used.

While [data show](#) that plastic bag taxes and fees have helped to disincentivize American shoppers from using plastic carryout bags, environmentalists stress that bans are a better long-term solution to the country's plastic pollution problem.

"This is a strategy known to get people in the habit of opting for reusable bags while avoiding plastic altogether," said Erica Cirino, communications manager for the Plastic Pollution Coalition.

"Reuse is a key principle (along with refill, repair, share, and regenerate) to eliminate wastefulness and pollution caused by the production of single-use packaging and items, especially plastic."

Article 2:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/some-consumers-business-owners-frustrated-pittsburgh-plastic-bag-ban/>

Some consumers, business owners frustrated with Pittsburgh plastic bag ban

By Erika Stanish

October 18, 2023 / 7:06 PM EDT / CBS Pittsburgh

PITTSBURGH (KDKA) -- Plastic bags are now a thing of the past in Pittsburgh. A ban went into effect on Oct. 14, banning plastic bags within city limits.

Moving forward, all grocery stores, restaurants and convenience stores will be prohibited from using plastic bags. Customers will have to use reusable bags or purchase a paper bag for 10 cents.

"It's for a good purpose. It's for a Pittsburgh that is cleaner and that is sustainable for our future generations so that our kids and our grandkids have a Pittsburgh that we can be proud of. It's litter free and has a healthy environment for everybody," said Councilwoman Erika Strassburger.

Strassburger proposed the legislation to city council last year.

"The whole goal here is to actually consume fewer, I would say quote-unquote 'free bags.' They've never actually been free. They've just been wrapped up in the cost of doing business," Strassburger said.

Jeff Cohen owns Smallman Street Deli in the Strip District and said while he's on board with helping the environment, he believes the city should have come up with more practical alternatives to plastic bags. He said using paper bags for to-go orders is not ideal for customers.

"You can't put your paper bag in on the right side because if you put it sideways what will happen with sandwiches is, they will be messed up and people want their money back," Cohen said.

Cohen said he's tried to find alternatives but believes the city should have assisted restaurants and other businesses before putting the ban in place.

"I've always said this: I don't think government should be into people's business. They're there to regulate things, and not to tell people how to run their business. In this case, the city should have come up with about a half a dozen different alternatives to help the businesses to have alternatives to change from plastic to paper," Cohen said.

Meanwhile, some yinzers said they're still trying to adjust the ban.

"I'm for the ban, but I want to get used to bringing my own bag, which I'm forgetting," said Nancy Tamilia, who works in the city of Pittsburgh.

Plastic bags not included in the ban include small fruit and vegetable bags at the grocery store or those used to wrap meat products. Also exempt from the ban are plastic bags used at the dry cleaners or at pharmacies when packing medications.

Everywhere else, including liquor stores, grocery stores and restaurants, are banned from using plastic bags. Some consumers are worried about the cost of buying paper bags at places like the grocery store.

"If it's ten cents, it will add up in my budget," Jane Umalin said, a Pittsburgh resident.

"I'm kind of not with it at the grocery store because I need extra bags," said Amy Terhorst, a Pittsburgh resident.

Others said they're in favor of the ban and turning to more sustainable alternatives to reduce waste in the city.

"We today purchased a bag at the bakery and are excited to do that. So I think it's a great thing for Pittsburgh and for the environment for the whole world," Dawn Klejka said.

Right now, businesses have a grace period where if they have a stockpile of plastic bags, they can continue to use them until Jan. 1.

After that, the city will be conducting inspections where a business could get fined up to \$250 for using plastic bags.