

**§1611. Plastic bag reduction**

**1. Definitions.** As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Plastic" means an organic or petroleum derivative synthetic or a semisynthetic organic solid that is moldable, and to which additives or other substances may have been added. "Plastic" does not include natural polymers that have not been chemically modified. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

B. "Point of sale" means a check-out stand, cash register or other point of departure from a retail establishment. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

C. "Post-consumer recycled material" means a recycled material that if not recycled would otherwise have been destined for solid waste disposal, having completed its intended end use and product life cycle. "Post-consumer recycled material" does not include materials and by-products generated from, and commonly reused in, an original manufacturing and fabrication process. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

D. "Recycled paper bag" means a paper bag that:

(1) Is 100% recyclable; and

(2) Contains at least 20% post-consumer recycled material if it has a capacity to hold at least 8 pounds, [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

E. "Restaurant" means an establishment that sells prepared food directly to the consumer. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

F. "Retail establishment" means a store, a restaurant or a temporary business. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

G. "Reusable bag" means a bag with handles that:

(1) Is designed and manufactured to withstand a minimum of 75 repeated uses;

(2) Is machine washable or made from a material that can be cleaned and disinfected regularly;

(3) If made from plastic is at least 4 mils thick; and

(4) Has the capability of carrying a minimum of 18 pounds. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

H. "Single-use carry-out bag" means a bag that is made of plastic, paper or other material provided by a retail establishment within the retail establishment for the purpose of transporting merchandise away from the retail establishment or for packaging, protecting or otherwise containing merchandise within the retail establishment and that is not a recycled paper bag or a reusable bag. [PL 2019, c. 674, §1 (AMD).]

I. "Store" means a retail store that engages in the retail sale of merchandise, including food, goods, products and clothing. "Store" includes grocery stores primarily engaged in the retail sale of canned food, dry goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, fresh meats, fish and poultry and convenience stores engaged in the sale of a limited line of goods, including milk, bread, soda and snack foods, and prepared foods intended to be consumed off the premises. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

J. "Temporary business" means a seasonal or nonpermanent retail establishment such as a farmers' market or fair that sells merchandise including food, goods, products or clothing. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2019, c. 674, §1 (AMD).]

**2. Prohibition; exemptions.** This subsection governs the use of single-use carry-out bags.

A. Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, beginning April 22, 2020, a retail establishment may not provide a single-use carry-out bag to a customer at the point of sale or otherwise make single-use carry-out bags available to customers. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

B. The prohibition in paragraph A does not apply to:

- (1) Bags provided by a pharmacy to a customer for transporting a prescription medication away from the store;
- (2) Bags without handles used to protect items from being damaged or from damaging or contaminating other purchased items placed in a recycled paper bag or a reusable bag;
- (3) Bags used by customers inside a retail establishment to package loose items, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, coffee, grains, bakery goods, candy, greeting cards or small hardware items; to contain or wrap frozen foods, meats or fish; or to contain or wrap flowers or potted plants;
- (4) Laundry, dry cleaning or garment bags, including bags provided by a hotel to guests to contain wet or dirty clothing or bags provided to protect large garments like suits, jackets or dresses;
- (5) Newspaper bags;
- (6) Bags sold in packages containing multiple bags intended to contain garbage, pet waste or yard waste;
- (7) Bags used to contain live animals, such as fish or insects sold in pet stores;
- (8) Bags used for vehicle tires;
- (9) Bags used to transport chemical pesticides, drain cleaning chemicals or other caustic chemicals sold at a retail establishment;
- (10) Bags used by a hunger relief organization such as a food pantry or soup kitchen to distribute food directly to the consumer at no charge;
- (11) Bags that customers bring to the retail establishment for their own use or for carrying away from the retail establishment goods that are not placed in a bag provided by the retail establishment. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

C. A retail establishment may make single-use carry-out bags made of plastic that are exempted in paragraph B available to customers to bag products within the retail establishment other than at the point of sale only if the retail establishment:

- (1) Locates inside the retail establishment or within 20 feet of the main entrance to the retail establishment a receptacle for collecting any used single-use carry-out bags made of plastic; and
- (2) Ensures that single-use carry-out bags made of plastic that are collected by the retail establishment are recycled or delivered to a person engaged in recycling plastics. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

**3. Recycled paper bag fees and reusable plastic bag fees; exemptions.** This subsection governs fees assessed on recycled paper bags and on reusable bags made of plastic.

A. Beginning January 15, 2021 a retail establishment may provide a recycled paper bag or a reusable bag made of plastic to bag products at the point of sale as long as the retail establishment charges a fee of at least 5¢ per bag.

- (1) All amounts collected pursuant to this paragraph are retained by the retail establishment and may be used for any lawful purpose.

(2) A retail establishment may not rebate or otherwise reimburse a customer any portion of the fee charged pursuant to this paragraph. [PL 2021, c. 186, §18 (AMD).]

B. The requirement to charge a fee under paragraph A does not apply to:

(1) Stores at which less than 2% of retail sales are attributed to the sale of food and that have less than 10,000 square feet of retail area;

(2) Restaurants; or

(3) Hunger relief organizations engaged in distributing food directly to consumers at no charge.

A retail establishment exempt from charging a fee under this paragraph may charge a fee for a recycled paper bag or a reusable bag made of plastic. [PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 186, §18 (AMD).]

**4. Violations.** A retail establishment that violates a provision of this section is subject to civil penalties under section 349.

[PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW).]

**5. Preemption.** To ensure maximum effectiveness through uniform statewide application, the State intends to occupy the whole field of regulation of single-use carry-out bags at retail establishments beginning March 17, 2020. A local government may not adopt an ordinance regulating single-use carry-out bags at retail establishments and, beginning January 15, 2021, any ordinance or regulation that violates this subsection is void and has no force or effect.

[PL 2019, c. 617, Pt. J, §2 (AMD).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 2019, c. 346, §2 (NEW). PL 2019, c. 617, Pt. J, §§1, 2 (AMD). PL 2019, c. 674, §1 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 186, §18 (AMD).

The State of Maine claims a copyright in its codified statutes. If you intend to republish this material, we require that you include the following disclaimer in your publication:

*All copyrights and other rights to statutory text are reserved by the State of Maine. The text included in this publication reflects changes made through the Second Regular Session of the 131st Legislature and is current through October 15, 2024. The text is subject to change without notice. It is a version that has not been officially certified by the Secretary of State. Refer to the Maine Revised Statutes Annotated and supplements for certified text.*

The Office of the Revisor of Statutes also requests that you send us one copy of any statutory publication you may produce. Our goal is not to restrict publishing activity, but to keep track of who is publishing what, to identify any needless duplication and to preserve the State's copyright rights.

PLEASE NOTE: The Revisor's Office cannot perform research for or provide legal advice or interpretation of Maine law to the public. If you need legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.