

# Checkout Bag Regulation

## General FAQs

*The Checkout Bag Regulation Bylaw encourages the use of reusable bags by banning plastic checkout bags, and regulates alternatives like paper and reusable checkout bags.*

### Why is reducing the amount of single-use checkout bags important?

The average Canadian uses 400 plastic bags per year – this is the equivalent of 40 million plastic bags per year in Nanaimo alone! Many of these bags aren't getting reused or properly recycled through depot drop off. Instead, most plastic bags end up in our landfill, and sometimes end up in our waterways, storm drainage systems and greenspaces.

### What if I forget my reusable bag?

Starting July 1, 2021 businesses may still provide paper bags for a fee of \$0.15 each, and provide reusable bags at a minimum fee of \$1.00 each. Starting January 1, 2022 the fees go up to \$0.25 per paper bag, and a minimum of \$2.00 per reusable bag.

### Don't paper bags also have an environmental impact?

The bylaw minimizes the environmental impact of paper bags by ensuring they are made with at least 40% post-consumer content. Paper bags can be reused, recycled or used as green cart liners. Reusable bags for sale should be washable and capable of at least 100 uses.



### What is the best reusable bag?

The best reusable bag is the one you already own; please wash it regularly, and repair when needed.

If you are in need of a new bag, there are many types of reusable checkout bags. Most importantly, opt for one that is washable and capable of at least 100 uses.

Examples of durable and reusable bags materials include:

- Synthetic fabrics like nylon, polyester, recycled PET, and polypropylene (non-woven and woven polypropylene)
- Cotton or recycled cotton
- Other natural fabrics (e.g. hemp, jute)

### I use a rolling shopping tote. Can I keep using it?

Yes! Use the method that works best for you to transport items purchased or received from a business. In addition to rolling shopping totes, other alternatives to reusable bags include:

- Backpacks
- Straw baskets
- Bicycle panniers
- Rigid plastic tubs
- Crates

### Are produce bags banned?

No, produce and bulk food bags are not considered checkout bags under the bylaw and are exempted from the regulation. Other exempted bags include protective bags for newspapers and drycleaning, small paper bags, bags sold in multi-packs for lining garbage and organics carts, and bags used to protect oversized items. Visit our website for full details.

## Why are compostable and biodegradable (“bioplastic”) checkout bags not exempted?

The primary reasons for including compostable and biodegradable bags in the plastic checkout bag ban are:

- **Inconsistent labelling standards for bioplastics.** Some plastic bags labelled as compostable or biodegradable do not fully breakdown in our organics facility, resulting in micro-plastics in the soil.
- **There are volume limitations.** Our organics facility does not have the capacity to process compostable checkout bags if they were distributed at the current rate of plastic checkout bags.
- **Littering leads to plastic pollution.** Compostable bags only decompose in certain conditions, and do not sufficiently break down if they end up in ditches or waterways.
- **Consistency with neighbouring municipal bans.** Nanaimo’s Bylaw aligns with checkout bag regulations across the Province, making it more straight forward for businesses and consumers to prepare for and comply with the Bylaw.

## Does this mean I can no longer use liner bags in my carts for curbside collection?

The guidelines for using liners/bags in the curbside collection carts have not been affected by the checkout bag regulation. If you are unsure of the guidelines, please visit the garbage and recycling pages of our website.

## Who gets to keep the funds collected?

The fee will be charged and kept by the business. These fees can be used to help businesses recover the cost of more sustainable checkout bags and/or communications materials to outline their specific bag policy.

## It is after July 1. Why are some businesses still giving out plastic checkout bags?

The bylaw permits businesses to use up plastic checkout bag stocks that were purchased before bylaw adoption. This exemption ensures plastic checkout bags that were already purchased by a business do not go to waste.

## How will the bylaw be enforced?

The City uses an education-first approach, and we will support businesses meet the requirements of the bylaw.

## Are reusable bags safe to use during the COVID-19?

Yes. The BC CDC states the risk is low, and “COVID-19 transmission from handling reusable containers such as grocery bags, coffee mugs, dollar bills, coins, bulk bins and other reusable items has not been documented.”

The BC CDC allows the use of reusable bags, and for staff to pack grocery bags for customers requiring assistance. To keep staff safe during COVID-19, we ask you follow store policy, pack your own bags whenever possible, and wash your reusable bags regularly.

The BC CDC has specific information for reusable containers and grocery bags under the [food businesses](#) on the COVID-19 employers and workers section of their website.

## I use my plastic checkout bags more than once, why are they referred to as single-use items?

While it’s recognized a portion of plastic checkout bags are being reused, statistics show a significant amount are not being reused or recycled. It is estimated residents in Nanaimo dispose of 95 plastic checkout bags per person per year. This amounts to 9.5 million plastic checkout bags being landfilled in 2020, of which 3.5 million were empty when disposed. Of the 19,396 tonnes of flexible plastic packaging supplied to BC residents in 2019, only 22% was recovered for recycling.



*This FAQ list was developed from the City of Victoria’s checkout bag regulation outreach materials.*