



DATE: July 9, 2020

TO: Programs and Administration Committee
Planning Committee/Recycling Board

FROM: Elsee Lebsack, Program Manager

SUBJECT: Reusable Bags during COVID-19

SUMMARY

The June 18 update of the Alameda County Shelter in Place Order now allows consumers to bring their own reusable bags, cups and other items into stores. At the July 9 Programs and Administration Committee and Planning/Recycling Board meeting, staff will provide an overview of the recent changes and impacts for shoppers and local businesses in Alameda County.

DISCUSSION

The Alameda County Shelter in Place Order ([Appendix A, pg. 6](#)) revised on June 18 provided updated language that allows consumers to bring their own reusable bags, mugs, or other reusable items from home if they do not require handling by employees. This update came after two months' of restrictions on consumers bringing any reusable items into stores. Berkeley's Health Officer Order ([Appendix A, pg. 7](#)) allows reusables, but does not allow them to be placed on surfaces.

Additionally, the Governor's [Executive Order](#) (see "hot topics" sidebar) that temporarily suspended portions of the statewide single-use carryout bag ban (SB 270) expired on June 22. Therefore, retail stores are once again required to charge customers \$0.10 for every reusable bag or recycled paper bag provided at checkout.

Stores and eating establishments have been under enormous pressure to address the ever-changing requirements to protect employee and public health; resuming the practice of accepting customers' reusable bags may not occur immediately at all businesses. We have been in contact with the California Grocers' Association and they confirmed that some businesses may have purchased single-use bags when paper and reusable bags were more challenging to stock early in the pandemic, but that inventory of paper and reusable plastic bags is back to about 85% of pre-pandemic stock levels.

We have temporarily suspended enforcement of the Reusable Bag Ordinance and are not penalizing businesses for use of non-compliant bags during this temporary suspension. When we resume, it will be

done in a manner that is consistent with state and local guidance, and we will provide 30 days' notice to stores of when the change will take place.

As a result of both local and state updates, staff have developed the attached resource for the Reusable Bag Ordinance website, [Reusable Bag Questions during COVID-19](#), to educate the public about the current status of reusables and address the most common inquiries we have received during Shelter in Place. Staff have shared the resource via the ReusableBagsAC.org and StopWaste.org websites, via social media, and with member agencies via the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for information only.

Attachments: Reusable Bag Questions During COVID-19

Neighboring Counties: Status of Reusables During COVID-19

Reusable Bag Questions During COVID-19

Good news for reusable bags! On June 18, 2020 the Alameda County Public Health Department updated their [Shelter in Place Order \(20-14, Appendix A\)](#). **Customers are now permitted to bring their own bags, mugs, or other reusable items from home if they do not require handling by employees.** People can place them in carts and/or baskets, but they will need to bag their own groceries. Stores and eating establishments have been under enormous pressure to address the ever-changing requirements to protect employee and public health; resuming the practice of accepting customers' reusable bags may not occur immediately at all businesses. Please review the following FAQ for more information regarding reusable bags:

1. Why are some stores allowing customers to use their reusable bags but others do not?

Stores are adapting to constant changes in local and state regulations to protect employee and public health. On June 18, 2020 the Alameda County [Health Officer Order](#) (Appendix A, p. 6) was revised to allow customers to bring in their reusable bags if they do not require handling by employees. Some stores may need more time to make changes in their policies and procedures, and some stores may not be aware of the change yet. Please be patient during this complicated time.

2. Can stores still charge me for a bag even though they won't allow me to bring my own?

Yes, stores can charge for any bag they provide. However, some stores or employees may not be aware of the most recent change, and as a customer, you may ask them to allow you to use your own bag per the local [Health Officer Order](#) (Appendix A, pg. 6).

3. My local restaurant is giving out thin, single-use plastic bags. Can they do that?

Local and state bag laws do not allow single-use carryout bags to be provided by affected businesses throughout California. We recognize that many businesses are experiencing supply chain disruptions, and this has affected carryout bag inventory. Some businesses may have purchased single-use bags when paper and reusable bags were more challenging to stock early in the pandemic. We have temporarily suspended enforcement of the Reusable Bag Ordinance and are not penalizing businesses for use of non-compliant bags during this temporary suspension. Consider letting stores and restaurants know you would like them to stop distributing single-use bags, so they know their customers don't want thin plastic bags.

4. How can I learn more about the safety of using reusable bags during COVID 19?

Some reliable sources of information about reusable bags, cups and other items include:

- [Over 115 Health Experts Sign Statement Addressing Safety of Reusables During COVID-19](#)
- [Health Expert Statement Addressing Safety of Reusables and COVID-19](#)
- [The Safety of Reuse During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Reusable Grocery Bags: A Smart Choice But Play It Safe](#)
- [Shopping for Food During the Pandemic](#)
(includes translated materials in [Español](#), [中文](#), [한국인](#), [Tagalog](#), and [Tiếng Việt](#))
- [10 Safe Shopping Tips](#)

Neighboring Counties: Status of Reusables During COVID-19

San Francisco

- Ban of reusable items still in effect. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/1/20)
- SFE says they will lift the restriction "very soon" [Chronicle article](#) (6/26/20)
- Temporary suspension of enforcement, not requiring charge for paper or reusable bags. [SFE ordinance page](#)

Contra Costa

- Reusable bags permissible if not handled by employees. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/16/20)
- No county-wide ordinance, but [5 cities have local bag bans](#).

Marin

- Not permitting reusable items from home. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (5/15/20)
- No info about enforcement status of their [plastic bag ban](#).

Napa

- No reusable items from home allowed. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/18/20)
- No info about enforcement status of their [single-use carryout bag reduction ordinance](#).

San Mateo

- Not allowing reusable items. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/19/20)
- Suspension of requirement to charge for paper or reusable bags. Plastic bags still prohibited. [SM ordinance page](#)

Santa Clara

- Require customers using reusable bags from home to bag their own groceries or prevent use of reusable bags from home. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/10/20)
- Not enforcing prohibition of single-use bags. [SC ordinance page](#)

Solano

- Not permitting reusable items from home. [Health Officer Oder, Exhibit B and Appendix B](#) (6/12/20, 5/5/20)
- No county-wide or city-specific ordinances in place.

Sonoma

- Require customers using reusable bags from home to bag their own groceries or prevent use of reusable bags from home. [Health Officer Order, Appendix A](#) (6/18/20)
- Encouraging stores to resume compliance with county's [carryout bag ordinance](#).