



Ministry for the
Environment
Manatū Mō Te Taiao

Single-use plastic shopping bag ban

Answering customers' questions

The ban on single-use plastic shopping bags takes effect on 1 July 2019.

Customers may have questions about the new regulations. The following are a list of questions customers may ask and our recommended responses. The information in the boxes suggests some actions retailers can take.

Why can't I get a free bag anymore?

The Government has approved a ban on the sale and distribution of single-use plastic shopping bags. It comes into force on 1 July 2019.

Single-use plastic shopping bags are polluting our environment. They are lightweight and easily transported by wind and water. The Government is phasing out single-use plastic shopping bags because of their impact on our environment.

Which bags are banned?

See [our website](#) for pictures of bags included in the ban.

The banned plastic shopping bags are those made from any type of plastic under 70 microns in thickness, either new or unused, and with handles.

Banned bags cannot be given away or sold to customers for carrying home their sold goods.

You can still buy pet waste bags and bin liners.

Lightweight barrier bags (such as bags without handles used for perishable items like meat or fresh produce) are not included in the ban.

What should I use instead?

You can either go without a bag, bring in your own bag or buy a reusable bag at a small cost.

Note to retailer: You may wish to stock reusable bags in store or have a supply of boxes for customers to use. Community organisations such as Boomerang bags offer a bag share scheme and could be a good back-up option for small businesses.

Why can't you supply biodegradable or compostable bags instead?

The Government has also banned biodegradable and compostable bags that are under 70 microns in thickness. This is because they can be as harmful to nature as non-biodegradable plastics.

Currently, New Zealand does not have enough facilities which can completely break down biodegradable and compostable bags.

Can I reuse old single-use plastic bags that I have at home?

Yes. The ban only applies to new and unused bags. You are welcome to reuse old bags from home, including bringing them into the store to put your shopping in.

Will the ban really make a difference?

The ban will stop millions of single-use plastic shopping bags from entering the environment each year. This will benefit our waterways, ocean and wildlife.

I didn't bring enough reusable bags, what do I do?

You can buy a reusable bag in store for a small cost.

Note to retailer: You may wish to consider having a small number of boxes available or offer a small number of bags for customers to borrow and return.

Why do I need to pay for alternative bags?

All bags regardless of the material they are made from have a manufacturing cost. Reusable bags tend to be higher quality and therefore often cost more to make.

To save money make sure you bring reusable bags with you when you shop.

Why can't I use the bag that I brought in?

Note to retailer: If a customer presents a bag which is very dirty or damaged, you may wish to politely inform them the bag is too dirty or damaged to use and offer an alternative. If the customer questions your decision you can tell them the bag may contaminate the products inside such as unwrapped food, pose health risks to staff and put the customer at risk if the bag breaks.

What should I use as a bin liner now?

Bin liners are not included in the ban so you can still buy them. If you don't want to purchase a bin liner, you can try other options (eg, lining your bin with newspaper or washing your bin).

A home composting system can help reduce the smells in your bin and you may not need a bin liner.

What should I do with my bag once I have finished with it?

Note to retailer: If you are providing alternative bags for customers, you could let them know where to recycle them or what they can do with them at the end of their life.

I thought the ban just applied to supermarkets?

The regulations apply to all retail businesses in New Zealand, regardless of size and type.

What should I use to pick up after my pet?

Pet waste bags have not been included in the ban. If you don't want to buy bags just for pet waste, you could reuse plastic produce bags as these will still be available.

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