

Bag Ordinances: Six Month Implementation Report



February 2015

Thurston County Solid Waste

Bag Ordinances: Six Month Implementation Report

February 3, 2015

Thurston County Solid Waste
9605 Tilley Road SW
Olympia, WA 98512

www.ThurstonSolidWaste.org/Plastics

ThurstonSolidWaste@co.thurston.wa.us



Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. REPORTING FINDINGS TO LOCAL JURISDICTIONS.....	3
3. DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE LANGUAGE.....	4
4. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH.....	4
5. REPORTS OF BUSINESS NON-COMPLIANCE	5
6. RESULTS OF WASTE CHACTERIZATION STUDY.....	6
7. RESULTS OF RESIDENTIAL POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY	6
8. RESULTS OF BUSINESS POST-IMPLEMENTATION STUDY	7
9. NEXT STEPS.....	9

1. INTRODUCTION

The Thurston County Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) began addressing the issue of disposable shopping bags in late 2011. The concern was that, countywide, our residents used about 90 million plastic shopping bags per year. The material that plastic bags are made of, combined with the sheer volume used, has negative environmental impacts.

Thurston County Solid Waste was directed to research the issues and create a report for the local governments to review. The report, [Reducing Our Use: Plastic Shopping Bags](#), identified the concerns related to plastic bag use, the work that was done within our community, and the results of 3,700 surveys. The proposed solutions listed were suggested by our residents or were solutions being implemented elsewhere. The pros and cons of each option were included in terms of effectiveness and cost effectiveness.



This new report details the work done after the [Reducing Our Use: Plastic Shopping Bags](#) report was released, as well as the post-implementation survey results.

2. REPORTING FINDINGS TO LOCAL JURISDICTIONS

Solid Waste staff presented the [Reducing Our Use: Plastic Shopping Bags](#) report to each city and requested recommendations on next steps. Results are below:

Tumwater—work session on 12/11/12	Recommend drafting a bag ban ordinance. Minutes
Olympia—council meeting on 1/15/13	Recommend drafting a bag ban ordinance. Minutes
Rainier—work session on 1/22/13	Recommend supplier/manufacture of plastic bags pay the 5 cents a bag, rather than the consumer. Note
Bucoda—council meeting on 2/12/13	Recommend drafting a bag ban ordinance. Minutes
Yelm—study session on 2/27/13	Recommend countywide vote on plastic bag ban. Minutes
Tenino—council meeting on 3/26/13	Recommend drafting a bag ban ordinance. Minutes
Lacey—council meeting on 3/28/13	Recommend drafting a bag ban ordinance. Recommend countywide vote on plastic bag ban. Minutes

Solid Waste staff then provided the above recommendations to the Thurston County Board of Commissioners on May 1, 2013. Staff was directed to form a countywide stakeholders group of businesses, business associations, non-profits, and residents to develop language for an ordinance.

3. DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE LANGUAGE



Staff recruited stakeholders through notifications to chambers and business associations, local jurisdictions, the Solid Waste Advisory Committee, and our email contact lists. Press releases were used to reach the general public. A group of 15 volunteers was selected to represent the jurisdiction's business and residential concerns in an equitable manner. The group met on several occasions June-July 2013 to draft ordinance language. The draft was sent to the

Prosecuting Attorney's office for legal review. The stakeholders group approved those changes and the ordinance template was completed. The Board of Commissioners provided the completed ordinance language and a cover letter to all local jurisdictions on August 13, 2013. Four jurisdictions chose to adopt ordinances, which were slated to begin on July 1, 2014:

Tumwater	September 17, 2013 public hearing	<u>Tumwater ordinance</u>
Thurston County	September 24, 2013 public hearing	<u>unincorporated ordinance</u>
Olympia	October 8, 2013 public hearing	<u>Olympia ordinance</u>
Lacey	February 13, 2014 council meeting	<u>Lacey ordinance</u>

4. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Thurston County Solid Waste began a comprehensive campaign to prepare businesses and customers for the ordinance start date.

The first step was to develop a webpage as a central location for information at www.ThurstonSolidWaste.org/plastics. This included the following links:

- [Ordinance details and exemptions](#) provides a summary, the ordinance for each jurisdiction, and an extensive *frequently asked questions* page.
- [Resources for retailers](#) contained downloadable signs they could place on their entrances and checkout counters, in a variety of sizes, to help inform their customers.

- [Resources for shoppers](#) provides ideas on how to remember to take bags to the store, information on the importance of washing reusable bags, and ideas on how to make do-it-yourself reusable bags.
- [Sign up to receive periodic emails about the bag ordinance](#) enables the community to receive new information related to the bag ban, such as this report.
- [History of the bag ordinance project](#) provides details on all the steps taken before the ordinances were adopted.
- [Learn about the environmental and health impacts from plastics](#) provides information on various problems related to certain plastics uses and how to minimize the impacts



Staff then utilized the following methods to notify the community about the upcoming ordinance. The web resources were referenced in all outreach materials:

- Asked local Chambers of Commerce to include information in member newsletters and emails and allow us to provide presentations.
- Asked retail and grocer associations to include information in member newsletters and emails.
- Included a [billing insert \(PDF\)](#) in all March 2014 LeMay commercial trash bills.
- Mailed a [letter and flyer \(PDF\)](#) to 3,800 businesses on March 7, 2014.
- Sent several press releases to media between March 7 and June 20, 2014.
- Visited as many businesses as possible before July 1, 2014.
- Provided interviews to several radio and print media outlets.
- Sent emails to the several thousand contacts on our Constant Contact and 2good2toss lists.

5. REPORTS OF BUSINESS NON-COMPLIANCE

The webpage includes information on how residents can report a business that is still using disposable plastic bags. Once a report is received, staff contacts the business to investigate. Staff has received complaints on only four businesses, with investigative findings below:

- Was only using very large plastic bags for oversized items – these are exempt from the ban.
- Did not think ordinance applied to them but had always used paper bags. Would start charging as required.
- Was using existing stock of single-use plastic bags. Staff suggested they place signs at the register to inform customers of this fact to avoid further complaints.



- Store had switched to heavier plastic bags that met the definition of reusable bag. Staff suggested they place signs at the register to inform customers of this fact to avoid further complaints.

6. RESULTS OF WASTE CHARACTERIZATION STUDY

Every 5 years, [a waste characterization study](#) is performed to evaluate the composition and quantity of disposed materials at the Waste and Recovery Center, Rainier drop box and Rochester drop box. Samples are taken quarterly over the course of a year from various incoming waste generators.



Plastic bags make up a small percentage of the waste stream but cause significant problems in the general environment as well as the compost, recycling, and trash systems (please see [Reducing Our Use: Plastic Shopping Bags](#)).

The first three sorts were completed before the ban took effect. The last sort was done shortly after the ban started, while some stores and residents were using up supplies they had. However, a 53% reduction in bags was seen.

Type of waste generator	Average of first 3 pre-ban quarters	August, 2014	Percent reduction
Residential self-haul	.36%	.26%	28%
Rural drop boxes	.45%	.15%	67%
Single-family	.86%	.40%	53%
Multi-family	1.09%	.44%	60%
Non-residential self-haul	.04%	.01%	80%
Commercial	.38%	.17%	55%
Countywide average	.53%	.25%	53%

7. RESULTS OF RESIDENTIAL POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY



Staff promoted the follow-up survey to residents through websites, emails, press releases, radio interviews, and social media from November 13, 2014 to January 20, 2015. Over 7,300 surveys were completed.

A few highlights from the results are below - percentages are rounded. The [PDF of the survey results](#), with all comments, is 819

pages. The length is due to the fact that there were open ended questions and a number of other questions that allowed for comments. The information is very important and worth the time to review. We highly recommend you read it online rather than printing. [A shorter version, without comments is also available.](#)

Primary methods used to transport items after purchase		
Customers used:	Before July 1, 2014	Dec 31, 2014
Single-use plastic bags	63%	3%
Paper bags	8%	16%
Reusable bags	20%	53%
Cardboard boxes	Less than 1%	Less than 1%
Hand carry	Less than 1%	16%
Other	8%	12%

- 53% of customers learned about the ban through media outreach, 44% at stores from our signs or staff, and 9% did not know about the ban ahead of time.
- Over 48% of residents do not wash their bags. Staff will work to improve this number – see Section 9.
- We had hoped the stores would offer their boxes for reuse by customers, rather than paying their hauler to recycle the boxes. Staff will work to improve this number – see Section 9.
- 17% of residents report fewer plastic bags on the side of the road.
- 7% of residents note that more people are using reusable bags even in areas that did not adopt ordinances.
- 20% of residents are more aware of their plastics use and are trying to reduce it.
- 30% changed where they shop to avoid stores that have implemented the ordinance.
- Respondents provided an interesting array of methods used to remind themselves to bring bags to the stores.
- Residents listed ways they have adapted to not having single-use grocery bags for things such as pet waste or trash can liners.
- A combined 46% feel the “ordinances should be kept in place” (15%) or “kept and expanded to other jurisdictions” (31%) while 54% feel the ordinances should be removed.
- Of those that stated they now usually carry out their purchases in reusable bags, 69% feel the bans should be retained or expanded.



8. RESULTS OF BUSINESS POST-IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY

Staff promoted the business survey via the same routes as was provide to residents (see Section 7). The messaging indicating there were surveys for both customers and

businesses. In addition, we provided text that the local chambers of commerce and the retail and grocers associations could send out to their members.



Unfortunately only 65 retail responses were received. Of the 65 that responded, 15 did not provide their store name or contact information. This means we cannot verify that all responses are actually from businesses. This may alter the business survey results so in cases where the responses differed significantly, we have provided both below. The [total business survey results](#) and the [verified business survey results](#) are both available, with comments, online.

A few highlights from the results are below - percentages are rounded.

- 57% of responses were from Olympia.
- Only 3% did not know about the ordinance in advance, 38% were informed via media and 25% from the letter we mailed to businesses.
- 68% provided plastic bags to customers before July 1, 2014. After the ban the total was 18% (15% state they were using existing stock and 3% are exempt).
- 21% of retailers state they offered cardboard boxes before July and 25% offer them now. This is interesting since less than 1% of customers report using cardboard boxes.
- Stores report, overall, that 12% of customers used reusable bags before the ban and 21% do now.
- 60% of retailers report customer spending is the same in their stores as before the ban while 29% say they are not spending the same. (This is 68% and 21% from those verified as businesses).
- Retailers were asked when factoring in the fees they charge for bags, and the number of bags they now give out, how the ordinance has affected their overall bag expenses. Responses are below:

How has the ban changed your bag expenses?	Response by percent	Response by number
Increased 25% or less	9%	5
Increased 26% or more	17%	9
Decreased 25% or less	9%	5
Decreased 26% or more	6%	3
Costs are about the same	25%	13
Not sure	34%	18

- Question 11 asked about challenges or problems in relation to the ban, and the two choices checked the most were “customers that wanted a plastic bag” or “customers that did not want to pay for a paper bag” (55% each). Forty four percent checked

“increased shoplifting” and 38% chose “slower checkout lines”. These negatives were all several points lower for respondents that verified their information. The “other” category provided some good insight as well that can be seen in the survey results.

- 58% of businesses feel the ordinances should be removed while a combined 42% say they should be kept in place (24.19%) or kept and extended to other jurisdictions (17.74%). However, of those that verified their information, 49% of businesses feel the ordinances should be removed while a combined 51% say they should be kept in place (29.79%) or kept and extended to other jurisdictions (21.28%).

9. NEXT STEPS



A. Staff will release the report and survey results:

1. Provide the report to all city councils and the Thurston County Board of Commissioners.
2. Post the report online.
3. Notify community members that signed up for an email update when it is posted.
4. Send out press releases on results.

B. Staff will emphasize washing reusable bags:

1. Request Environmental Health promote the importance of washing reusable bags.
2. Solid Waste will create a “wash your bag” reminder sign for stores and add it to the “*Resources for Retailers*” webpage.
3. Solid Waste currently has information on their website at www.co.thurston.wa.us/solidwaste/bags/docs/SafeReusableBagGuidelines.pdf but will move it to a more prominent location.
4. Press releases about this report will include this as an important item for consumers.

C. Staff will promote other carry-out options besides paper and reusable bags, such as cardboard boxes or milk crate type totes.

D. Staff will promote the ideas from resident’s responses about how they remember their reusable bags and what they are using for trash can liners and pet waste collection.

E. Staff will resurvey and report again by July 1, 2016.