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Washington's new bag law takes effect, reducing plastic pollution and waste

OLYMPIA. Washington's new single-use plastic bag ban will go into effect on October 1, 2021. As of that date, retailers in the state will no longer hand out single-use, thin film plastic bags. If customers do not bring their own reusable bags, retailers can provide paper bags or reusable thicker plastic bags for an 8-cent fee, which is retained by the retailer to cover the higher cost of those bags.

The law, championed by Senator Mona Das (D-Kent) and Representative Strom Peterson (D-Edmonds), passed in the 2020 legislative session and was the 8th such law enacted in the nation. It was originally slated to take effect on January 1, 2021, but due to supply issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Inslee delayed implementation.

"Single use plastic bags and products have contaminated our communities for many decades," said Giovanni Severino, Lead Policy Organizer with Latino Community Fund of Washington. "This law is a big step to clean our planet from toxics that reach our communities everywhere."

"More and more customers are already bringing reusable bags to stores and restaurants," said Nora Nickum, Ocean Policy Manager at the Seattle Aquarium. "This law reminds us to take that easy but important step to reduce plastic waste and protect our ocean."

"Plastic bags are one of the most common items entangling wildlife, and because they resemble food to marine life, they are often consumed by marine mammals and sea turtles in U.S. waters," said Sara Holzknecht, Washington Field Representative at Oceana. "This plastic bag law will help protect our beloved marine animals."

"Single-use plastics, including plastic bags, are among the most common items we find on beach cleanups," said Gus Gates at Surfrider Foundation. "This law, together with the bill passed this year to ban expanded polystyrene foam products and reduce unwanted plastic food service items, will help keep Washington's coastlines clean for future generations."

"Residents across Washington are concerned about the increasing load of plastic all around us," said Pam Clough, Acting Director of Environment Washington. "Most plastic bags are used for only a few minutes before being thrown away, so implementing this law and promoting reusable bags are important steps in the right direction. Nothing we use for a few minutes should pollute our environment for centuries."

“Thin-film plastic bags often end up choking storm drains or coating our waterfront,” said Sean Dixon, Executive Director at Puget Soundkeeper Alliance. “Before we can turn the tide on plastic pollution, or climate change, algal blooms, or a host of other environmental and public health problems, we have to stop making things worse – starting October 1, we’ll do just that. This one change will drive an immediate, lasting improvement in the health of our communities and watersheds, statewide.”

“Furthermore, thin plastic bags wrap around recycling equipment, and facilities need to shut down for hours while workers cut out the bags,” said Heather Trim, Executive Director of Zero Waste Washington. “Laws like this one protect workers and improve the efficiency of recycling operations and get us towards true zero waste.”

Plastics Free Washington Coalition/ Washington Sin Plástico members:

Environment Washington [Environment Washington](#) is a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization working for a cleaner, greener, healthier future.

Latino Community Fund of Washington The [Latino Community Fund](#) cultivates new leaders, supports cultural and community based non-profit organizations, and improves the quality of life for all Washingtonians.

Oceana [Oceana](#) is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one third of the world’s wild fish catch.

Puget Soundkeeper [Puget Soundkeeper](#)’s mission is to protect and enhance the waters of Puget Sound for the health and restoration of our aquatic ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. To date in 2021, over 700 Soundkeeper volunteers have removed 3,000 pounds of debris from waterways around Puget Sound.

Seattle Aquarium [Seattle Aquarium](#)’s mission is Inspiring Conservation of Our Marine Environment.

Surfrider Foundation The [Surfrider Foundation](#) is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world’s ocean, waves and beaches, for all people, through a powerful activist network.

Zero Waste Washington [Zero Waste Washington](#) drives policy change for a healthy and waste-free world.