

New Jersey Prepares to "Get Past Plastic"

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Law to Reduce Single-Use Plastic Bags and Polystyrene Foam Products Takes Effect May 4



(22/P14) TRENTON – New Jersey Department of

Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette today urged the public to get ready for the state’s plastic bag and polystyrene foam food-service container law that takes effect May 4, just 30 days away, by stocking up on reusable bags and visiting the DEP’s Get Past Plastic website. He also reminded food-service businesses that another provision of the law requires that single-use plastic straws to be distributed only at the customer’s request has been in effect since late last year.

“Plastics pollution has become one of the world’s most pressing environmental problems,” Commissioner LaTourette said. “Americans alone use some 100 billion plastic bags each year. While some of these bags are recycled, many end up in landfills and many more wind up as litter that is harmful to our communities, ecosystems, and wildlife. Sadly, these plastic bags get into our marine environments, killing fish, dolphins, whales, and other types of marine life.

“It’s very important for all of us to work together to make a lasting difference in protecting our communities and environment from plastics pollution,” Commissioner LaTourette added. “If you haven’t already done so, you should stock up on reusable bags and start using them right away. It will make things so much easier in the long run – and you will feel great about doing it.”

The NJ Clean Communities Council has been working closely with the state to educate the public and businesses through its BagUpNJ campaign.

“With the statewide bag ban quickly arriving on May 4, we are urging all New Jersey shoppers to get in the routine of bringing their own bags to the store every time they shop,” said Clean Communities Council Executive Director JoAnn Gemenden. “It’s all about creating new habits. Remember to keep your reusable bags in a convenient location where you won’t forget them – and get used to using them, as we work together for a cleaner, litter-free New Jersey.”

The law, signed by Governor Murphy in 2020, requires grocery stores and retail establishments to no longer provide single-use plastic bags to customers. In addition, grocery stores 2,500 square feet or larger may not provide customers with single-use paper bags. The law also prohibits the sale of polystyrene foam takeout food containers and other polystyrene food-service products such as plates, cups, food trays and utensils.

The DEP's new Get Past Plastic website offers a wealth of information about the law, including information about the types of reusable bags you should use. It also includes information about single-use plastic straw requirements.

"We know that businesses have been preparing all year for the May 4 start date for the plastic bag and polystyrene food service products law," said Melanie Willoughby, Executive Director of the New Jersey Business Action Center. "But there might still be questions from their customers, so the NJBAC is here to help answer those questions on our 1-800-JERSEY-7 help-line. We want to ensure that the businesses and their customers have a smooth transition."

As the state gears up to implement the law, the DEP offers the following guidelines to help the public:

What you need to know about plastic and reusable bags:

Supermarkets and grocery stores

These stores will no longer provide single-use plastic bags or paper bags for your groceries. Bring your own reusable bags or purchase them at the store. (Stores under 2,500 square feet may still provide paper bags.) Reusable bags should be made of polypropylene fabric, PET nonwoven fabric, nylon, cloth, hemp product, or other washable fabric; have stitched handles; and be designed and manufactured for multiple reuses. Bags are available at most grocery stores and retailers, as well as through online merchants.



These stores will still be allowed to provide plastic bags to hold loose items such as uncooked meats, fruit, vegetables, flowers, greeting cards, and other loose items. Every store is going to come up with their own plan to comply with the law. For more information, contact the store.

If you have single-use plastic bags at home, you may continue to use them within your home or you can bring them to use when you shop. It is only the grocery store that is unable to provide single-use plastic or paper bags upon checkout.

Restaurants

Takeout customers should be prepared to be given single-use paper bags as well as some hot food plastic bags that are used to hold items such as soup and chili. It is recommended that customers bring their own reusable bag in case the restaurant is no longer providing single-use

paper bags. You may still receive your food in a paper bag at drive-through restaurants, but plastic bags will no longer be allowed. You may still get plastic utensils with meal orders as in the past. Sit-down restaurants may provide “doggie bags” made of any material except polystyrene foam.

Retail stores

Retail stores of any size may provide customers with single-use paper bags but may not provide single-use plastic bags. The DEP encourages consumers to get into the habit of bringing reusable bags when shopping at any retail store. Pharmacies can provide customers with single-use paper bags and can also use plastic bags to hold prescriptions. The DEP encourages consumers to bring reusable bags to pharmacies for other purchases.

Food Pantries and Food Banks

In recognition of the hardships the pandemic has placed on many people, food pantries and food banks will have until Nov. 4 to comply with the plastic bag provisions of the law under legislation signed recently by Governor Murphy. The Clean Communities Council will provide them with 500,000 reusable bags for distribution. They may also provide paper bags.

What you need to know about polystyrene foam food-service containers

- You will no longer be able to purchase plates, cups or utensils made from polystyrene foam. You will still be able to purchase plastic utensils and plastic or paper plates and cups.
- For the next two years certain polystyrene foam food service products will be exempt from the law including: Raw and deli-sliced meats, poultry and fish trays, portion cups of two ounces or less, if used for hot foods or foods requiring lids. Food pre-packaged by the manufacturer in a polystyrene foam container also is permitted for sale.
- Polystyrene foam food-service products such as ice cream cups, coffee cups, and soup containers will be prohibited. Food delivery will no longer be able to be served or delivered in polystyrene. This food may be delivered in other materials such as plastic, paper, or aluminum products.

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