

RCW 70A.530.005 Intent. (1) State policy has long placed waste reduction as the highest priority in the collection, handling, and management of solid waste. Reducing plastic bag waste holds particular importance among state waste reduction efforts for a number of reasons:

(a) Single-use plastic carryout bags are made of nonrenewable resources and never biodegrade; instead, over time, they break down into tiny particles. Single-use plastic carryout bags, and the particles they break into, are carried into rivers, lakes, Puget Sound, and the world's oceans, posing a threat to animal life and the food chain;

(b) Plastic bags are one of the most commonly found items that litter state roads, beaches, and other public spaces; and

(c) Even when plastic bags avoid the common fate of becoming litter, they are a drain on public resources and a burden on environment and resource conservation goals. For example, if plastic bags are disposed of in commingled recycling systems rather than as garbage or in retailer drop-off programs, they clog processing and sorting machinery, resulting in missorted materials and costly inefficiencies that are ultimately borne by utility ratepayers. Likewise, when green or brown-tinted plastic bags confuse consumers into attempting to dispose of them as compost, the resultant plastic contamination undercuts the ability to use the compost in gardens, farms, landscaping, and surface water and transportation projects.

(2) Alternatives to single-use plastic carryout bags are convenient, functional, widely available, and measure as superior across most environmental performance metrics. Alternatives to single-use plastic carryout bags feature especially superior environmental performance with respect to litter and marine debris, since plastic bags do not biodegrade.

(3) As of 2020, many local governments in Washington have shown leadership in regulating the use of single-use plastic carryout bags. This local leadership has shown the value of establishing state standards that will streamline regulatory inconsistency and reduce burdens on covered retailers caused by a patchwork of inconsistent local requirements across the state.

(4) Data provided from grocery retailers has shown that requests for paper bags have skyrocketed where plastic bag bans have been implemented. To accommodate the anticipated consequences of a statewide plastic bag ban, it is rational to expect additional capacity will be needed in Washington state for manufacturing paper bags. The legislature intends to provide that capacity by prioritizing and expediting siting and permitting of expansions or reconfiguring for paper manufacturing.

(5) Therefore, in order to reduce waste, litter, and marine pollution, conserve resources, and protect fish and wildlife, it is the intent of the legislature to:

(a) Prohibit the use of single-use plastic carryout bags;

(b) Require a pass-through charge on compliant paper carryout bags and reusable carryout bags made of film plastic, to encourage shoppers to bring their own reusable carryout bags;

(c) Require that bags provided by a retail establishment contain recycled content or derive from nonwood renewable fiber; and

(d) Encourage the provision of reusable and compliant paper carryout bags by retail establishments. [2021 c 33 § 3; 2020 c 138 § 1.]

Application of RCW 82.32.805 and 82.32.808—2020 c 138: "RCW 82.32.805 and 82.32.808 do not apply to this act." [2020 c 138 § 9.]