

Portland clamps down on all plastic bags

Ban expanded to all retail stops, even food carts

By Tim Becker



A plastic bag at a grocery store. (KOIN 6 News, file)

PORTLAND, Ore. (KOIN) — Plastic bags have already been removed from grocery stores. But on Tuesday Portland's plastic bag ban expanded to food vendors and other small business.

As of Tuesday, all small Portland businesses including restaurants and [vendors at the Portland Farmers Market](#) can no longer offer petroleum-based disposable bags. Instead, [as decided by a 2012 Portland City Council vote](#), all shops in Portland must use paper bags or reusable bags.

The bag-ban effort was [solidified in 2012](#) when "City council declare[d] an emergency exists because the on-going use of single-use plastic shopping bags is harmful to the public health and welfare."

- [Frequently-asked questions about Portland's plastic bag ban](#)

Inside Bai Mint on Woodstock, Krit Unhawatt welcomed new customers Tuesday along with a new way of doing business.

"They used to be right here," Unhawatt said of his previous plastic-bag stash, "so it's easier for us to pack."

Now the plastic bags that once hung in the kitchen are now upstaged by a fresh stack of brown paper bags.

"Normally we would prefer plastic, 'cuz it holds better and the handles are stronger than paper," he said. "But this is a requirement."

The "any" food vendor requirement goes for food carts too. Tuesday's expansion of a rule that once only applied to retail establishments of more than 10,000 feet was expanded now applies to even the smallest retailer: convenience stores, hardware stores, drugs stores. All must only provide recycled paper bags or reusable bags for customers.

But there are some exceptions. The policy exempts bags provided by a pharmacist to conceal prescription medication and bags without handles used to protect a purchased item from another purchased item, such as produce and meat, according to a [City of Portland letter](#). Businesses leftover plastic bags may apply for a waiver “to allow for the draw down of existing inventory,” according to the city’s letter.

- **[How to apply for a waiver](#)**

“It can be an inconvenience to have a paper bag,” said Bliss Newton, marketing coordinator for [the People’s Coop on SE 21st Avenue in Portland](#). “However, there are so many alternatives now — in terms of reusable bags that are water proof and pretty sturdy.”