

## Scan of Policy Options Adopted by Other Jurisdictions





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## 1. Introduction

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Waste & Recycling Services (WRS) conducted a scan of other jurisdictions globally that have strategies in place to reduce waste from single-use items. This document provides findings from the external scan of 18 jurisdictions, including the strategies that have been implemented and the resulting impacts and unintended consequences.

## 2. Policy Options

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The following options were identified as ways to reduce waste from single-use items:

- Bans – making it illegal to distribute items.
- Fees – charges on items provided to customers.
- On-demand strategies – items will only be provided on customer request.
- Mandatory reduction plans – businesses and organizations must determine how best to reduce the use of items and report on their success.

Single-use items that have been targeted and policies that have been adopted by different jurisdictions are listed in Appendix 1.

### 2.1 Bans

Bans require enacting a law or bylaw that makes it illegal for businesses to distribute specific single-use items to customers.

Bans can be very effective in achieving a significant reduction in the use of these items within a short amount of time. For example, there was a 90 per cent decrease in plastic bag litter after plastic bags were banned in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Alberta. Penalties for non-compliance may include warnings or fines.

Some jurisdictions that have enacted bans also have exemptions for some items or stakeholder groups. For example, there are exemptions to plastic straw bans to accommodate persons with disabilities, while some jurisdictions with plastic bag bans have exemptions for raw foods to ensure public health and safety. Also, to prevent the overuse of paper bags where plastic bags are banned, a fee is charged on paper bags in some jurisdictions.

Costa Rica intends to ban all single-use plastics by 2021, the European Union will ban ten single-use items by 2021, and Taiwan is planning a ban on all single-use items by 2030<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Costa Rica announced it intends to be the first country in the world with a comprehensive national strategy to eliminate single-use plastics. According to the Taiwan EPA, in 2030 no single-use plastic items will be allowed to be manufactured, imported or sold anywhere in Taiwan.

## **2.2 Fees**

This approach requires businesses to charge a minimum mandatory fee, at the point of sale, when an item is provided to the customer. Businesses may charge more than the minimum fee at their discretion. Typically, businesses keep the money from these fees and may use it to offset the cost of the items, or donate it to charity. The government may require that all or a portion of the fee be paid by the businesses to the government to fund related programs.

Fees can be very effective for reducing the use of single-use items. For example, The United Kingdom experienced a 70 - 80 per cent decrease in plastic bag use after a fee was introduced.

## **2.3 On-Demand Policies**

An on-demand approach requires businesses to provide items to customers only on request. This tends to limit distribution, as customers will request items only if needed. In Vancouver, 71 per cent of residents indicated they would reduce their use of single-use items, if they were required to ask for that item at the time of purchase<sup>2</sup>. Most jurisdictions with policies for straws and utensils have adopted this approach.

## **2.4 Mandatory Reduction Plans**

Mandatory reduction plans require businesses to have plans in place to reduce the distribution of single-use items. Under this approach, businesses can adopt the reduction plans that work best for them. Businesses may decide to use one or a combination of the previously listed policies. They are also required to track and report on the number of single-use items distributed. Of the jurisdictions reviewed, only Vancouver has adopted this strategy and will complete a review in three years to determine its effectiveness. If the reduction targets are not met, Vancouver will evaluate the need for a bylaw specifying the approach that businesses must take.

# **3. Item Specific Policies**

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## **3.1 Plastic Bags**

Canadians use approximately 2.86 billion plastic bags every year<sup>3</sup>. It is estimated that over 581 million plastic bags were distributed in Alberta by grocers, retailers and pharmacies in 2013. The City of Calgary collects roughly 90 million plastic bags for recycling at the Materials Recovery Facility annually.

Most jurisdictions with single-use items strategies in place target plastic bags, with fees and bans being most common. Exemptions for health and safety reasons such as food packaging

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<sup>2</sup> City of Vancouver, "Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy 2018-2025" (May, 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Plastic Oceans "Why we launched Plastic Oceans Foundation in Canada" (January, 2018)

are common. In Canada, most jurisdictions with policies for plastic bags have implemented a ban. The Northwest Territories charges a fee for plastic or paper bags provided to the customer. Retailers in Prince Edward Island will start charging 15 cents for each plastic bag issued to consumers from July 1, 2019 and this will increase to 25 cents on January 1, 2020.

In Calgary, major retailers such as Calgary Co-op, Real Canadian Superstore, Walmart, and Dollarama voluntarily charge customers five cents for plastic bags. In considering the option of a fee for plastic bags, the specific fee to be charged and options for the revenue stream would be evaluated

### **3.2 Plastic Straws**

The State of California and Portland, Oregon are some of the jurisdictions that have implemented on-demand policies for plastic straws. Bans are in place or are being considered in the following jurisdictions:

- The City of Vancouver is planning to ban the distribution of single-use plastic straws, with a tentative implementation date of April 22, 2020 (taking into consideration appropriate exemptions for health care needs).
- The City of Seattle became the first major city in the US to ban plastic straws in July 2018.
- The United Kingdom plans to ban plastic straws at some time between October 2019 and October 2020, subject to feedback from public consultation.
- The European Union voted in October 2018 to ban several single-use items, including plastic straws by 2021.
- Fast food chains in Taiwan will be prohibited from distributing plastic straws in 2019.

Some global food service restaurants also plan on taking steps to reduce waste from plastic straws:

- Starbucks intends to stop using plastic straws by 2020.
- McDonald's began a phased rollout of paper straws to all restaurants in the UK and Ireland in September 2018, with completion planned for 2019.

In July 2018, over 150 establishments in Calgary participated in the "Last Straw" campaign coordinated by Plastic Free YYC to encourage consumers to reduce plastic straw use. As part of this initiative, more than 50 establishments in Calgary have gone permanently straw-free.

### 3.3 Plastic Utensils

Several jurisdictions have banned plastic utensils:

- The Republic of Korea banned free distribution of plastic utensils in 2015.
- Monaco has a ban on the manufacture, distribution and sale of utensils made of less than 40 per cent bio-based materials.
- The Seychelles island nation prohibited the manufacture, importation, distribution and sale of plastic utensils<sup>4</sup> in 2017.
- Seattle is the first city in the US to ban plastic food utensils in the food services industry.
- The City of Malibu (US) banned plastic utensils in June 2018.
- Plastic utensils are included in the list of items the European Union plans to ban by 2021.
- France intends to implement a ban on plastic utensils in 2020.

Since May 2017, food service providers in Culver City California have been required to provide plastic cutlery to customers only on request. In Canada, starting November 2019, The City of Vancouver will prohibit business licence holders from distributing single-use utensils unless requested by the customer.

### 3.4 Disposable Cups

France intends to ban the distribution of all disposable cups by 2020 and Taiwan in 2030. Disposable coffee cups are currently banned in Scottish government offices.

In Vancouver, business license holders will be prohibited from distributing foam cups beginning January 2020. In addition, businesses are required to have plans in place to reduce the amount of other disposable cups (paper cups, disposable plastic cups, single-use cups designed and marketed as disposable/ compostable) they distribute. Vancouver plans to review the effectiveness of this strategy in three years to determine if further action is needed.

Though some coffee shops in Calgary offer financial incentives to customers who bring their own reusable cups, disposable cups are still the norm.

### 3.5 Take-Out Food Containers

Portland, Seattle and San Francisco have implemented a ban on foam food containers. Businesses in Vancouver will be banned from providing food in foam containers beginning January 2020. The City of Vancouver is also exploring the option of supporting container exchange networks. A container exchange offers reusable takeout containers through participating restaurants. Dirty containers are returned to the restaurant or a drop-off location

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Environment Programme "Report on Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global review of National Laws and Regulations" (Accessed December, 2018).

for collection and washing at an industrial facility. The clean containers are then distributed to participating restaurants.

#### **4. Unintended Consequences of Policy Options**

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Strategies aimed at reducing waste from single-use items may have some unintended consequences. Engaging all stakeholder groups that may be impacted and understanding impacts of proposed options will be key to the success of the strategy. WRS will consider the following potential risks in developing a single-use items strategy.

##### **4.1 Costs for Businesses and Consumers**

If an item is banned, alternatives need to be readily available and affordable to consumers. Any proposed strategy will also need to consider potential impact on the cost of doing business.

##### **4.2 Health Risks**

It is important to consider health limitations when deciding on the appropriate approach. Banning plastic straws may negatively affect persons with disabilities. Also, healthcare facilities tend to use disposable items for health and safety reasons. Some types of plastic bags are used to package raw or bulk foods to ensure health and safety.

##### **4.3 Environmental Impact of Alternatives**

Care must be taken to ensure strategies do not cause overuse or misuse of alternatives. In some instances, consumers may treat alternatives the same way as single-use items. In Portland Oregon, recycled paper checkout bag use increased 491 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Some studies have also suggested canvas bags may need to be used 130 times before they start achieving any net environmental benefit when compared with single-use plastic bags<sup>6</sup>.

##### **4.4 Enforcement**

To ensure the success of any single-use items reduction strategy, monitoring and enforcement will be required, which will increase program costs.

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<sup>5</sup> City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability, "Promoting Reusable Checkout Bags in Portland: One Year Report" (October 3, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Bloomberg Article "How a Ban on Plastic Bags Can Go Wrong", (August 18, 2015).



#### **4.5 Legal Considerations**

There have been legal challenges in some jurisdictions:

- The Canadian Plastic Bag Association challenged The City of Victoria in court over its plastic bag ban. The City's ban was upheld by the B.C. Supreme Court in June 2018, and is going to the B.C. Court of Appeals.
- Manufacturers in Austin and Dallas sued authorities for banning plastic bags and the courts sided with the manufacturers.
- The City of New York was engaged in a three-year legal battle on its proposal to ban foam food and beverage containers. The state Supreme Court sided with The City in June 2018.

There have also been instances of conflict between government authorities. For instance, The State of New York passed legislation blocking the proposed fee on plastic bags by The City of New York, citing government overreach.



## APPENDIX 1: SELECT JURISDICTIONS WITH POLICIES ON SINGLE-USE ITEMS

Jurisdiction	Targeted Item(s)	Policy Type	Date
<b>Canada</b>			
City of Vancouver	Plastic straws	Ban	April, 2020
	Foam cups and take-out containers	Ban	January, 2020
	Plastic utensils	On-demand only	November, 2019
	Plastic and paper bags, and disposable cups	Mandatory reduction plans (ban if reduction targets are not met by 2021)	2019 to 2020
City of Victoria	Plastic bags	Ban	July, 2018
	Paper bags	Fee	July, 2018
City of Montreal	Plastic bags	Ban	January, 2018
	Foam cups, plates and containers, disposable plastic cups, plastic utensils and take-out containers	Ban	2020 (anticipated)
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo	Plastic bags	Ban	September, 2010
Northwest Territories	Plastic bags	Fee	February, 2011
Prince Edward Island	Plastic bags	Fee	July, 2019
<b>United States</b>			
City of Seattle	Foam cups and take-out containers	Ban	January, 2009
	Single-use packaging for take-out food	Ban	July, 2010
	Plastic bags	Ban	July, 2012

ISC: Unrestricted



Jurisdiction	Targeted Item(s)	Policy Type	Date
	Paper bags	Fee	July, 2012
	Plastic straws and plastic utensils	Ban	July, 2018
City and County of San Francisco	Plastic bags	Ban	April, 2007
	Paper bags	Fee	October, 2013
	Foam cups and take-out containers	Ban	January, 2017
	Plastic straws, stirrers, toothpicks, beverage plugs, cocktail sticks, coated paper based food containers	Ban	July, 2019
	Plastic and compostable utensils	On-demand only	July, 2019
City of Portland	Foam containers	Ban	March, 1989
	Plastic bags	Ban	March, 2013
	Plastic straws, utensils, stirrers and condiment packaging	On-demand only	July, 2019
State of California	Plastic bags	Ban	November, 2016
	Paper bags	Fee	November, 2016
	Plastic straws	On-demand only	January, 2019
City of New York	Foam food containers	Ban	January, 2019
	Plastic bags	Ban	March, 2020 (anticipated)
New York State	Plastic bags	Ban	January, 2019
City of Chicago	Plastic and paper bags	Fee	February, 2017



Jurisdiction	Targeted Item(s)	Policy Type	Date
<b>Europe</b>			
France	Plastic bags	Ban	2016
	Plastic straws (Paris)	Ban	2019
	Plastic utensils, plates and cups	Ban	2020
United Kingdom	Plastic bags	Fee	October, 2015
	Plastic straws, stirrers, cotton buds	Ban	Between 2019 and 2020
European Union	Plastic straws, plates, forks, knives, spoons, sticks, drink stirrers, cotton swab sticks, balloon sticks, and foam (EPS) food and drink containers	Ban	2021
	Plastic food containers and drink cups	Mandatory reduction	2025
<b>Others</b>			
Taiwan*	Plastic bags, disposable food containers, beverage cups and utensils	Fee Fee increase Ban	2020 2025 2030
	Plastic straws	Fee (in-store use) Fee (carryout) Ban	2020 2025 2030
Costa Rica	Plastic bags, food containers, steam protection packaging, plates/tableware, cups, cutlery, straws, bottles, coffee stirrers, toothpicks, cotton swab sticks and disposable razors	Ban	2021

\* Taiwan intends to implement a fee for all items in 2025 (increase the fee for plastic bags) and move to a blanket ban of all items by 2030.