



Seattle Public Utilities

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October 3, 2016
For Immediate Release

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FIRST IN NATION

Council votes to ban “greenwashing” of non-compostable bags

Seattle lawmakers also move to make permanent city’s 5-cent paper bag fee

SEATTLE — The City Council today voted unanimously to make Seattle the first place in the nation to ban the use of misleading green- and brown-tinted non-compostable plastic bags. The lawmakers also moved to prohibit the use of false “eco” labeling on non-compostable bags, and to make permanent Seattle’s five-cent charge for recyclable paper shopping bags.

“This [ordinance](#) continues Seattle’s national leadership role of innovative approaches to waste prevention, composting, and recycling,” said Sego Jackson, a waste-prevention expert at Seattle Public Utilities.

“Now residents will be able to tell which bags are truly compostable and which are not because bag manufacturers and retailers will help provide clarity rather than confusion.

“Seattle residents do a great job recycling, composting and using reusable bags. They care about doing the right thing and this legislation will help them do it by eliminating greenwashing tactics related to bags,” Jackson said.

Food waste composting in Seattle has increased every year since 2008, when its collection was made available for all single-family residents. Many Seattle residents use green tinted compostable bags to collect their food waste. However, most green produce-type bags are made of petroleum-based plastic.

Some plastic bags are mistaken for compostable because they are tinted green, have the words “eco” or “bio” and symbols such as leaves and trees printed on them. Some are printed with confusing terms such as degradable or biodegradable.

When people unknowingly use these “look-alike” plastic bags, they wind up polluting our local compost. The ordinance approved by the Council today, the first of its kind in the nation, will help keep plastic out of our compost.

The ordinance requires that all compostable bags provided to customers by retailers must be tinted green or brown and must be labeled compostable. The legislation also requires the bags to meet strict composting standards in order to be labeled as compostable.

Any provided plastic bag that is not compostable may not be tinted green or brown. Confusing or misleading terms such as “degradable” will not be allowed on bags provided to customers.

The ordinance also makes permanent the current requirement that retailers charge at least five cents for each large recycled paper bag provided to customers. Plastic carryout bags are already banned by Seattle Code and will continue to be banned.

Since the bag ban ordinance became law, in 2012, residents have continued to increase their use of reusable bags and decreased the plastic bags in residential garbage by half.

Learn more about Seattle Public Utilities, at: www.seattle.gov/util.

Watch a [short video](#) about SPU.

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Seattle Public Utilities provides essential services. We deliver pure mountain drinking water, recycling and composting that lead the nation, and sewer and drainage systems to protect our local waterways. These services safeguard your health and our shared environment, and help keep Seattle the best place to live.