



To: Zero Waste Advisory Commission

From: Bob Gedert, Director, Austin Resource Recovery Department

Date: May 8, 2012

Subject: Single-Use Bag Update

Ordinance Timeline

March 1st – City Council Adoption of Single Use Bag Regulation Ordinance
April 11th – ZWAC briefing
April & May – Stakeholder interviews and staff research
May 9th – ZWAC briefing
May 23rd – Memo to Council (approximate date)
May & June – Development of Director Rules
May - Sept – Public Education and Outreach
June or July - Council Ordinance Revision – Paper Bag definitions
July – Posting of Director Rules
July-Oct – Notification to Retailers
Oct – Professional Services contract awarded for extensive consumer education and outreach

Intent of Ordinance Amendments

On March 1, 2012, the City Council approved Ordinance 20120301-078, also known as the Single Use Bag Ordinance. The Single Use Bag Ordinance regulates the carryout bags that businesses are authorized to provide to their customers. Director Rules are being developed as a guidance document for implementation of the Council adopted ordinance.

Public Education

Based on staff interaction with the public since approval of the Ordinance, many citizens and businesses are confused or do not have facts about the Single Use Bag Ordinance's requirements. It is clear that extensive public education and outreach is essential to clarify what consumers should expect from businesses at checkout. Retailers have expressed similar concerns about consumer confusion.

From May through the end of September 2012, Austin Resource Recovery will focus on providing general education to the public and businesses about the Ordinance and its requirements. The Department will support this effort with paid print and radio advertising, guest articles with the neighborhood association newsletters, social media, and bag distribution to encourage direct communication and interaction with local consumers.

Department staff will also solicit and secure a contract for the professional services of a marketing agency to continue education and outreach efforts. The contract will require City Council review and approval. Staff anticipates presenting the City Council with a proposed contract for services by September 2012.

Bag Distribution

The Department is partnering with the City's Health and Human Services Department's Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) Centers as well as Capital Metro and the Capital Area Food Bank to distribute approximately 30,000 bags to their customers. Additional bags will be distributed by Department staff at several events throughout the summer, including Juneteenth and select Blues on the Green events.

Certification Options and Cost Impacts for Paper Bags

During Ordinance deliberations, staff recommended requiring FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification for paper bags. The City Council expressed concerns about the cost impact of such a requirement. Additionally, there is confusion regarding the difference between FSC and SFI (Sustainable Forest Initiative) certification programs. This issue will be addressed through a Council Memo and potential ordinance amendment.

Plastic Bag Construction Definition

During stakeholder deliberations, concerns have been raised about the 4 mil plastic bag standard. An alternative replacement being considered involves a national certified "walk test" that validates reuse standards for plastic bag manufacturers. This issue will be addressed in the Director Rules, as a potential "alternative compliance" of the 4 mil requirement.

Emergency Access Concerns

The City Council specifically expressed concern about consumer options if the consumer forgot their bag. This issue is being researched and will be addressed in the Director Rules.

Identify manufacturers of reusable bags and their location

Council requested staff to investigate bag manufacturers and their locations. Staff is researching the location and distribution networks, and will provide an update to ZWAC and Council within a couple months. In addition, staff will work with the Economic Growth and Redevelopment Services office to support the development of reusable bag manufacturing within Austin.

Retailer Notification

A written notification will be sent to all retailers affected by the ordinance. The notice will include a copy of the ordinance, the Director Rules, as well as support signage and an employee/consumer education kit. This notice will be coordinated with the contracted marketing agency for the single-use bag ordinance education and outreach campaign.