

COVID-19 FAQs for Retailers and Restaurants

Should my business be charging for bags?

Yes, retail stores and eating establishments should be charging for compliant bags. There was a temporary suspension of bag charges in May and June due to a Governor's Executive Order which expired at the end of June 2020. Stores are now required by both [State Law SB 270](#) and the [Alameda County Reusable Bag Law](#) to charge for and distribute [compliant bags](#).

If stores and restaurants are legally required to charge for and distribute compliant bags, why are some still not doing so?

There are a variety of reasons why some businesses may not be compliant with the law. Many businesses are simply not aware that stores and eating establishments are required to resume charging for compliant bags. Some businesses may still not have adequate inventory of compliant bags, and some may have to follow a corporate decision to not accept or charge for reusable bags. All stores are encouraged to comply with the [Alameda County Reusable Bag law requirements](#).

My store stocked up on non-compliant bags during the early days of Shelter in Place due to lack of availability of bags, can I still distribute them?

No. Businesses should be ordering and distributing [compliant bags](#). Non-compliant bags can be donated to nonprofits such as food banks who are in need of bags for food distribution to community members without enough to eat. Contact information for foodbanks in need can be [found here](#).

Can my store accept reusable bags from consumers?

Yes! Consumers are eager to bring their own bags to the store and the current Alameda County Shelter in Place Order allows customers to bring in their reusable bags if they do not require handling by employees. Details relating to the acceptance of reusable bags in stores can be found in the County [Health Officer Order](#) (Appendix A, p. 9). Berkeley's Public Health Division has its own [Health Officer Order](#) (Appendix B, pg. 10) that has the same language as Alameda County's Order.

Is it safe for my store to accept reusable bags in?

Many studies and health experts have provided documentation regarding the safety of reusable bags and foodware items relating to COVID-19 concerns. Over 115 health experts from 18 countries, including virologists, epidemiologists, emergency room doctors, and specialists in public health and food packaging safety, [signed onto a statement addressing the safety of reusable bags and containers during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). More information is available [here](#) for review.

What if I have questions about the law not answered here?

If you have questions about the law, we'd like to help you understand the changes and offer assistance. Please complete our [online contact form](#), or email us at bags@stopwaste.org.

What happens to stores not complying with the law?

We encourage businesses to comply with the reusable bag law as the environment has suffered from increased usage of single use plastic during the pandemic. In an abundance of caution, we have temporarily suspended store inspections - we will provide 30 days' notice to businesses prior to resuming inspections.