

Short History of Single-use Bags in Austin

In 2007, the City Council adopted a [resolution](#) directing the City Manager to evaluate and recommend strategies for limiting the use of non-compostable plastic bags and promoting the use of compostable and reusable bags.

The City partnered with the Texas Retailers Association (TRA) and Keep Austin Beautiful to launch the Austin's Got a Brand New Bag awareness campaign to encourage the use of reusable bags. The initiative lasted 18 months from January 2008 through June 2009 and included efforts to reduce bag consumption, issue free and sell low-cost reusable bags to patrons, and provide free plastic bag recycling to customers. To evaluate success, the TRA provided data regarding the pounds of bags purchased and recycled to serve as baseline data. At the end of the 18-month initiative, the TRA issued [their report](#). While retailers focused on reducing plastic bag consumption and providing recycling opportunities, the City concurrently evaluated its role in managing plastic bags.

From May 2008 to August 2008, the City of Austin's Solid Waste Services (SWS) Department (recently renamed Austin Resource Recovery) implemented the [Recycle the Bag](#) pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of a curbside plastic bag recycling program. The program targeted a cross section of the Austin-area demographic incorporating 5,000 households.

At the conclusion of the pilot, the Department released a [summary report](#). Based on low participation rates, increased collection costs, low volume of material per household, limited potential for an adequate return on investment, and presence of easily accessible recycling drop-off sites currently available to the community, the Department discontinued the pilot program, but continued to promote community-wide use of reusable shopping bags and recycling drop-off locations.

Beginning in 2010, the Austin City Council directed staff to pursue more in-depth evaluation of the impacts of plastic bags to the community and in 2011, directed staff to develop an ordinance regulating single-use plastic bags.