



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO



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**CONTACT:**

Mary Kay Accurso

312.744.3944

[Mary.Accurso@cityofchicago.org](mailto:Mary.Accurso@cityofchicago.org)

**CHICAGOANS REDUCE DISPOSABLE BAG USE BY OVER FORTY PERCENT SINCE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF CHECKOUT BAG TAX**

*Study Determined that the Checkout Bag Tax Has Already Significantly Decreased the  
Number of Disposable Bags Used and the Number of Customers Using Disposable Bags*

Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced today that Chicagoans significantly reduced the average number of disposable bags used per shopping trip in the first month of the Checkout Bag Tax, demonstrating measurable success in the City's effort to reduce paper and plastic bag use in Chicago. Results from a preliminary study by ideas42—a behavioral design lab—and researchers from New York University and the University of Chicago Energy & Environment Lab show that the bag tax has already decreased the number of disposable bags used per shopping trip by 42 percent. These results are similar to the decrease in disposable bag use other municipalities saw following the implementation of a bag tax.

"I am glad so many Chicagoans are choosing to forgo paper or plastic bags at checkout, and encourage others to help Chicago further reduce disposable bag use in the city," said Mayor Emanuel. "By decreasing our paper and plastic bag use, Chicago is making important progress in reducing our carbon footprint as well as reducing street litter and improving recycling operations."

The City of Chicago commissioned this study to evaluate consumer behavior following the implementation of the Checkout Bag Tax. The study tracked bag use of customers at several large grocery chains in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs before and after the tax was implemented to compare consumer experience and determine the possible environmental impact.

Preliminary results from the study demonstrate that after the seven-cent tax was implemented in Chicago:

121 NORTH LASALLE STREET, ROOM 507, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60602

- Disposable bag use per trip decreased by 42 percent;
- Residents using disposable bags decreased by 33 percentage points;
- About half of customers who stopped using disposable bags switched to using reusable bags while others used no bags at all.

“We know from our work in behavioral science that while shoppers often want to do the right thing for the environment, they sometimes need a little help, and our team’s study shows clearly that the Checkout Bag Tax is effective in reducing the use of disposable bags,” said Ted Robertson, a Managing Director with ideas42. “These promising results not only benefit Chicago’s environment, but may also inform other municipalities around the nation.”

The City established a seven-cent bag tax on paper and plastic bags to help reduce the use of disposable plastic and paper bags used in Chicago, and while this tax is new to Chicago, many other major cities previously established a tax or fee on disposable bags and have had success in curbing disposable bag use. For example, [a study of grocery store shoppers](#) in the Washington Metropolitan Area showed that a five-cent tax on disposable bags reduced the number of bags shoppers took at checkout. The study showed that prior to the bag tax, 82 percent of shoppers took at least one bag at the checkout stand. After the imposition of the tax only 40 percent did.

Further, cities and counties that implemented a bag tax continue to see ongoing reductions in disposable bag use as consumers become more familiar with the tax and bringing their own bag shopping becomes more prevalent. Chicago intends to study consumer behavior related to disposable bag use over multiple years and anticipates similar ongoing reduction in paper and plastic use as more consumers build in the habit of going bagless or bringing their own reusable bag.

"It is great news that disposable bag use has declined since the Checkout Bag Tax went into effect," said Jen Walling, Executive Director of the Illinois Environmental Council. "We've all seen where disposable bags often end up - wrapped around trees and bushes, in Lake Michigan or the Chicago River, blowing around on windy days. Hopefully the reduction we've seen so far is a first step in getting all of these bags out of our environment."

Under Mayor Emanuel’s leadership, Chicago’s reduction in waste has played a significant role in improving the City’s environment. From 2010 to 2015 Chicago’s carbon emissions from waste were down 30 percent, with the expansion of the City’s recycling program playing a significant factor. During those five years the City increased the numbers of tons of recycled material from 58,000 to 97,000.

The preliminary study by ideas42, New York University, and the University of Chicago Energy and Environment Lab is available at: [www.ideas42.org/cbdt](http://www.ideas42.org/cbdt)

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