

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



STEVEN BELLONE
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

JAMES L. TOMARKEN, MD, MPH, MBA, MSW
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

To: Dr. James L. Tomarken
From: Christopher Sortino
Date: March 1, 2019
Subject: Annual Recycling Report, Progress of Single-Use Carryout Bag Reduction

Effective January 1, 2018, Suffolk County Local Law No. 27-2016, A Local Law To Reduce The Use Of Carryout Bags In Retail Sales, required stores to charge customers a minimum fee of 5 cents for carryout bags that are provided at retail stores. The purpose of the law is to encourage consumers to use their own reusable bags for shopping and to reduce the environmental impacts associated with single-use bags.

This report will provide information on the progress of single-use carryout bag reduction in Suffolk County.

1. **Single-use carryout bags:**

The Food Industry Alliance of New York State, Inc. (FIA)* reports the following data, comparing bag purchases by retailers for calendar year 2018 to calendar year 2017:

2018-2017 Comparison	
Plastic	Paper
81.7% ↓	78.8% ↓

*FIA is a not-for-profit trade association that advocates on behalf of grocery, drug and convenience stores throughout New York and is the largest grocery store trade association in New York, representing thousands of supermarkets across the state, including chains and independents.



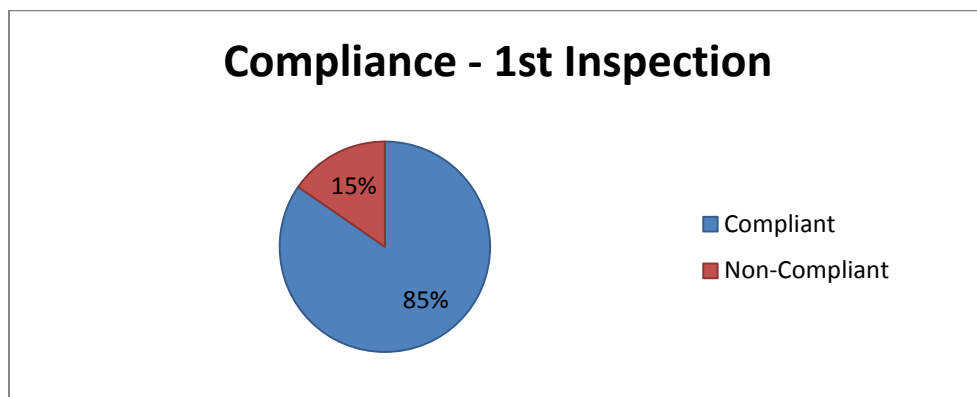
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2. **Reusable bags:**

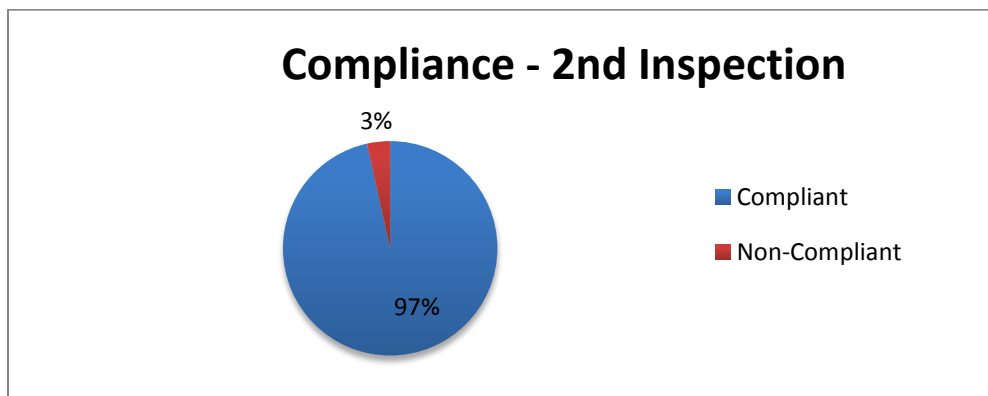
The 5 & 5 Education and Effectiveness Working Group, established by the Suffolk County Legislature to analyze the impact of the law, conducted a study to better understand bag usage behavior before and after implementation of the law. Teams were deployed to a supermarket, a pharmacy and a convenience store in each of 7 different towns in Suffolk County. The teams were stationed outside of the establishments and the number of individuals using plastic, paper and/or reusable bags were counted. Hash marks were tallied as individuals were observed carrying products out of the stores. Data was collected at each location on one weekday night and one weekend day prior to implementation of the law, in November-December of 2017; and after implementation of the law, in November-December of 2018. Approximately 3,000 customers were observed in each study period. The study showed that use of reusable bags or no bags increased from 27.8% prior to implementation of the law to 60.1% after implementation of the law. The data indicates that 32.3% of shoppers observed in our study have changed their behavior since implementation of the law and are now using reusable bags or no bags.

3. **Violations cited:**

The law is enforced by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services' Bureau of Public Health Protection. Enforcement of the law began with a 6 month period during which consumers and retailers were educated about the law's requirements. A "Bring Your Own Bag, Keep The Earth Alive" campaign was launched and included a webpage, informational brochure and Frequently Asked Questions for retailers and shoppers. A total of 345 retail stores covered by the law were inspected for compliance, 46 in response to complaints and 299 routine compliance checks. Notices of Violation were issued to 53 establishments (15%), who were not charging the required fee for carryout bags.



Retailers found to be out of compliance were educated on how to comply with the law and follow-up inspections were scheduled. Twelve establishments (3%) were found to be out of compliance during a follow-up inspection. Notices of Violation were issued to the 12 non-compliant establishments and formal legal action was initiated.



4. Waste and litter reduction benefits:

The American Littoral Society*, Northeast Chapter, reported a 41.8% decrease in plastic bags (grocery and other combined) and a 41.0% decrease in paper bags collected from Suffolk County shorelines during volunteer cleanups in 2018 when compared with 2017. The report also indicated that although the number of plastic and paper carryout bags collected was significantly lower, the number of volunteers participating in cleanups almost doubled in 2018 and the overall amount of debris collected in 2018 was significantly higher in 2018 than in 2017.

AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY, NORTHEAST CHAPTER									
2017 - 2018 BEACH CLEANUP RESULTS (BAGS OF DEBRIS REMOVED FROM SUFFOLK SHORELINES)									
Year	Cleanups Recorded	Filled Garbage Bags	Adult Volunteers	Children Volunteers	Debris (lbs)	Distance Covered (mi)	Grocery Bags (Plastic)	Other Plastic Bags	Paper Bags
2017	55	642	720	538	6257	54	969	1698	510
2018	46	1185	931	805	9478	60.75	465	1087	301

*Founded in 1961, the American Littoral Society is an environmental 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to the conservation of our coasts through education, advocacy, habitat restoration and community engagement.

5. Cost savings for the county attributable to single-use carryout bag reduction:

Nothing to report at this time.

Summary:

Retailers in our study area reported purchasing 81.7% fewer single-use plastic bags and 78.8% fewer paper bags after implementation of the law. Requiring shoppers to pay the five cent fee changed behavior in two ways:

- (1) More people are using no bags or reusable bags instead of single-use bags.
- (2) People who continue to use single-use bags are using less bags to avoid the fee.

These behavioral changes have resulted in a significant reduction in the use of single-use bags in Suffolk County.

A 41% decrease in the number of bags littering Suffolk County's shorelines was also reported. Enforcement data further indicates that retailers have successfully transitioned to charging the required fee and that only 3% of retailers surveyed are out of compliance with the law.

