BLOCK LEADER

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AUSTIN SAYS, "BRING IT" TO SHOPPERS AT THOUSANDS OF RETAIL OUTLETS

New Ordinance Encourages Environmentally-Friendly Reusable Bags

Reducing the number of flyaway, thin plastic bags that get snagged on tree limbs, lodged in creek beds and dumped in landfills is the goal of the City of Austin's Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance that took effect on March 1.

The new ordinance, passed unanimously by the Austin City Council last March, regulates the types of carryout bags that businesses can provide to customers and encourages a shift to reusable bags.

At checkout counters, businesses can offer their customers a choice of reusable bag options, including more durable plastic or paper bags with handles or reusable bags made out of fabric. The business can decide whether to charge for the bags.

"The Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance will go a long way toward reducing waste by removing thin plastic bags from most checkout counters," explained Austin Resource Recovery Director Bob Gedert. "We also need the public's help. That's why we're launching the Bring it Austin outreach initiative and encouraging shoppers to get in the habit of bringing reusable bags with them wherever they shop."

City leaders encouraged Austinites at a news conference to get in the habit of carrying reusable bags with them wherever they shop. Bicyclists pulling what appear to be giant reusable bags made appearances around Austin distributing free reusable bags.

Many Austinites have already grown accustomed to taking their own shopping bags to grocery stores, but remembering to take them to other kinds of stores likely will be an adjustment for many. The Bring it Austin initiative will educate shoppers and businesses about the benefits of shifting to reusable bags and about the new rules for carryout bags.

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CURBSIDE ORGANICS COLLECTION PILOT

Starting the week of Dec. 31, 2012, Austin Resource Recovery launched the Curbside Organics Collection Pilot. The pilot provides weekly organics pick-up to approximately 7,900 City customers and includes a new green 96-gallon organics collection cart and food scrap collector. The organics cart is used to collect food scraps, food-soiled paper and yard trimmings, among other items. These compostable materials make up nearly half of the waste stream that normally ends up in the landfill. Collecting organic materials at the curb will keep valuable materials out of the landfill, reduce harmful greenhouse gases and help Austin get closer to our Zero Waste goal to divert 90 percent of materials from the landfill by 2040.

So what happens to the organic material once it is collected? After curbside collection, organic materials are transported to Organics "By Gosh," a local composting facility. Organics "By Gosh" staff then mixes the organic materials with ground-up brush and applies water to the mixture. The compost "cooks" at about 131°F, allowing microbes and tiny living organisms to thrive and breakdown all the toxic and harmful substances in the mixture. After about nine months, the mixture is transformed into nutrient-rich compost that is ready to be sold at local retailers.

At present, pilot participants pay no additional cost for their new organics collection service. In fact, the pilot may actually result in cost savings. After putting food scraps and food-soiled paper in their organics carts, participants often have less trash to throw away each week. This may allow them to downsize to a smaller, less expensive trash cart and save money on their monthly utility bills. Austin Resource Recovery offers four trash cart sizes – the smaller the cart, the less it costs.

For more information about the Curbside Organics Collection Pilot, visit **austintexas.gov/austincomposts**

To downsize your cart call 494-9400

JOIN US FOR A FREE HOME COMPOSTING CLASS

Austin Resource Recovery's Home Composting Rebate program will not only allow you to reduce the amount of trash produce in your household, it's also an easy way to do something good for the environment. By composting organic materials, you help keep these valuable resources out of the landfills.

The program challenges Austinites to attend a free composting class, downsize to a 24 or 32-gallon trash cart and purchase a composting system for their home. Austin Resource Recovery curbside customers who accomplish these three goals are eligible for a rebate of 75 percent off the cost of their new home composting system, up to $75.

You and your neighbors can sign up to attend a class near you by visiting **austintexas.gov/composting,** just look under Upcoming Events. Can't attend an in-person class? You can also qualify for the rebate by watching an online version of the class at **austintexas.gov/composting**

Date	Class Time	Location
Apr. 6	10:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Zilker Garden Festival
Apr. 10	6 - 7 p.m.	Triangle Farmers' Market
Apr. 13	9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Downtown Farmers' Market
Apr. 22	6 - 7 p.m.	Ruiz Library
Apr. 24	6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Austin City Hall
May 7	6 - 7 p.m.	Spicewood Springs Library
May 15	6 - 7 p.m.	Triangle Farmers' Market
May 16	6 - 7 p.m.	Manchaca Road Library
May 25	9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Downtown Farmers' Market
May 29	6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Austin City Hall
June 8	9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Sunset Valley Farmers Market
June 19	6 - 7 p.m.	Terrazas Branch Library
June 22	9:30 - 10:30 a.m.	Downtown Farmers' Market
June 24	6 - 7 p.m.	Hampton Branch Library at Oak Hill
June 26	6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Austin City Hall

"BRING IT, AUSTIN"

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"A high-quality reusable bag has the potential to replace 600 thin plastic bags over its lifetime," said Gedert. "During our yearlong education effort, the City will be giving away thousands of reusable bags at events and locations across Austin to help those who may need more assistance obtaining bags."

The City has already been reaching out to businesses that will be affected by the ordinance and held training sessions for businesses to learn about the new carryout bag rules. Also, Austinites can expect to see messages on television, radio and online, in English and Spanish, reminding them to keep reusable bags on hand.

The ordinance is not a ban on all plastic bags and provides for a few exemptions that include produce bags, dry cleaner bags and packages of bags used for trash as well as allowing restaurants to use single-use bags for takeout items that could cause moisture damage. Nonprofit food banks and other charities will also be exempt from the ordinance.

For complete details about the Single-Use Carryout Bag Ordinance, visit **www.bringitaustin.com.**

SXSW

Musicians and movie stars weren't the only ones keeping busy during South by Southwest 2013. Austin Resource Recovery staff worked day and night picking up litter, sweeping the streets and cleaning the alleys. Across the busiest areas of the City, Austin Resource Recovery added an additional 190 trash containers. For business customers, trash service was increased from twice weekly to daily and recycling collection increased from weekly to daily. The total number of recycling containers for businesses also increased this year. SXSW gives our department an opportunity to show the world how we help keep Austin clean.

UPCOMING EVENTS

It's event season, and this spring Austin Resource Recovery is participating in a number of events throughout the City. Come grab a reusable bag, and learn more about our services. Our staff is happy to answer any questions!

April 6
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Annual Zilker Garden Festival
Location: Zilker Park

April 13
11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
Keep Austin Beautiful Clean Sweep Volunteer Party and Environmental Fair
Location: Fiesta Gardens
keepaustinbeautiful.org

April 20
12 to 7 p.m.
Austin Earth Day Festival
Location: Mueller Park
earthdayaustin.com

May 19
12 to 5 p.m.
Viva Streets
Location: Sixth Street from Brazos to Robert Martinez
vivastreetsaustin.org

June 15
9 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Annual Juneteenth Celebration
Location: Intersection of Comal and MLK

We add additional events often. For an up-to-date list, please see our website at **austinrecycles.com**

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