

Single-Use Retail Bag Environmental Fee – Questionnaire Response

Northwest Territories (NWT) residents are concerned about the environmental effects of plastic bags littering their communities and landscape and have asked the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) to work toward reducing and eliminating plastic bags from the NWT.

A very effective way to reduce and eliminate the use of plastic bags is to charge a fee for each bag used. ENR developed regulations to implement a 25¢ environmental fee for single use plastic and paper retail bags beginning January 15, 2010. This environmental fee will be directed to ENR’s Environment Fund to be used for program administration and to fund expansion of waste reduction and recovery programs in the NWT.

The first phase of the program is focused towards the retail grocery sector as this is where the bulk of plastic bags are used. The second phase of the program will apply to all retailers in the NWT.

An information sheet about this program and a questionnaire were mailed out to 245 NWT retailers in June 2009. Some highlights of responses and comments from thirty (30) grocery retailers and twenty-seven (27) other retailers are presented here.

WHAT YOU TOLD US:

- Responses about Plastic Bag Use in the NWT

Fifty-seven responding retailers spend about \$98,932 to give out more than 3.26 million single-use retail bags to customers on an annual basis. Approximately 90% of these bags were distributed by the 30 grocery stores surveyed.

Most retailers purchase their bags wholesale from southern manufacturers; other retailers are supplied with paper and plastic bags by their head office. Depending on location, retailers purchase cases of bags wholesale once a month, quarterly, every six months or once a year as a barge order. Smaller retailers use fewer bags and their supply may last two or three years.

- Responses about remitting the environmental fee:

	Grocery Retailers	Other Retailers	All Retailers
Pay the fee upfront when purchasing bags wholesale and recoup the cost later from the customer	30%	48%	39%
Collect from the customer first then remit to ENR	60%	30%	46%
No Opinion/declined to answer	10%	22%	16%

Smaller retailers commented that although paying upfront would be easier for them, they will take a loss because of defective bags.

“A lot people are going ‘green’ themselves. We need to look at garbage generally and we need to get into recycling at our community dumps.”

“We need more education on what happens to our garbage.”

“I plan on eliminating plastic bags at my store when my current supply runs out.”

“Collecting and remitting the fee on behalf of government means more administrative work for our business.”

- Responses about reducing and eliminating single-use plastic bags:

- 56 % would like to see a total ban on the use of plastic bags;
- 20% preferred to see an expansion of the fee to all retailers;
- 16% thought a total ban on plastic bags is unrealistic; and
- 8% declined to answer this question for various reasons.

Some retailers commented that even though these are called single-use bags, consumers use plastic bags more than once.

- Comments about an environmental fee program:

Nearly 40% of respondents volunteered comments in support of an environmental fee program to reduce single-use retail bag use.

A third of grocery retailers and a quarter of the other retailers strongly expressed their concern that a 2-phase program is unfair and may be confusing to consumers.

Some retailers stated that 25 cents is a very high fee and suggested five or ten cents might be more appropriate.

- Comments about local retailers taking the initiative

A number of retailers and communities are taking their own steps to reduce and eliminate the use of plastic bags. Most grocery retailers and many other retailers stock cloth bags for a small fee and have cloth bag give-aways from time to time. Many retailers ask if the customer needs a bag. Some retailers said they will not be ordering new plastic bags after their current stock is used.

- Comments about preparing the public

Most retailers felt it was extremely important that the public knows both the purpose of implementing the Environmental Fee and when it will come into effect. Otherwise, some retailers felt they might have to explain the reason for the fee to consumers and deal with some consumer displeasure.

- Follow up

Further information on the implementation of the environmental fee program will be forthcoming.

“We need to raise consumer awareness on this issue. We gave cloth bags away but people forget to bring their cloth bags.”

“It’s a good idea.”

“All retailers should have to abide. It’s only fair and the most effective way to reduce waste.”

“Twenty-five cents is extremely high. Five to ten cents would be sufficient.”

“We are encouraging use of cloth bags for just about 2 years now. They are catching on!”

“Let the consumer know. You need to be clear with the public that this is a government fee and support the stores as they will be the ones dealing with the consumer.”

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR TIME, INPUT AND COMMENTS!
It is appreciated.