

Leave your reusable grocery bag at home in coronavirus pandemic, some markets tell customers

3 April 2020, by Andrew Sheeler



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Californians four years ago voted to ban single-use plastic bags, moving to protect the environment by doing away with the oil-based products that too often wound up in gutters and waterways.

Today, the coronavirus pandemic has those good intentions on hold.

The flimsy plastic bags are not back in stores, yet. But some California [grocery stores](#) are asking customers not to bring the re-usable bags that replaced the light, [single-use plastics](#) after the ban took effect.

They're trying to protect their employees from contracting the new coronavirus by asking workers only to handle paper bags and heavy plastic bags provided by the stores. The grocery stores effectively are back to single-use bags.

"We're doing everything we can to keep our stores sanitized and safe," said Ron Fong, president and

CEO of the California Grocers Association. "First and foremost, we're trying to keep our employees and customers safe."

Fong said he didn't have a list of stores that are banning reusable bags, but that the decision to do so is being made on a [store](#)-by-store basis.

So far in Sacramento, at least the Natural Foods Co-Op and Nugget have asked customers not bring [reusable bags](#). The union that represents grocery store workers also wants grocery customers not to bring re-usable bags.

Grocery store workers are on "the front line of danger" from COVID-19, said John Grant, president of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 770.

"Cashiers and clerks have a limited amount of personal protective equipment as it is," Grant said.

Restricting the use of reusable grocery bags, which Grant said his group supports, will help protect not only grocery store employees but also other customers.

"The question is reduce the number of surfaces or incidents where the virus is transmitted, and this is just another surface," he said.

Both Fong and Grant said that grocery store employees have no way of knowing whether a person has sterilized their bags in between uses.

"We don't know because there's no way to police that," Fong said.

Because of the increased volume of business, [grocery](#) stores have been running short on both paper and reusable [plastic bags](#), he said.

"We can't get them to stores fast enough," Fong said.

Fong said that customers are not required to use bags, that they can also put their purchased items back in the cart and transport them directly to their vehicle.

"That's actually preferable to us," Fong said.

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