

Owner Communities

Bridgton
Cape Elizabeth
Casco
Cumberland
Falmouth
Freeport
Gorham
Gray
Harrison
Hollis
Limington
Lyman
North Yarmouth
Portland
Pownal
Scarborough
South Portland
Waterboro
Windham
Yarmouth

Associate Members

Baldwin
Hiram
Naples
Parsonsfield
Porter
Saco
Standish

Contract Members

Andover
Augusta
Brownfield
Carmel
Chebeague Island
Cornish
Eliot
Etna
Fryeburg
Glenburn
Greenland, NH
Jay
Kittery
Limerick
Livermore Falls
Manchester
Monmouth
Newburgh
Newington, NH
North Haven
Old Orchard Beach
Poland
Readfield
Sanford
Stetson
Stockton Springs
Swan's Island
Waterville
Wayne
Woolwich

ecomaine encourages alternatives to recycling plastic bags in municipal recycling programs

*consumers are encouraged to opt for re-usable shopping bags
to reduce single-use plastic bags from the waste stream*

PORTLAND, Maine (November 21, 2016) – Just in time for the busiest shopping season of the year, and in a move to reinforce the “reuse” rung of the waste management hierarchy and reduce recycling contamination, ecomaine is encouraging the use of reusable shopping bags and directing plastic film recovery to neighboring grocery stores and big box retail collection points effective immediately.

Maine’s leader in long-term, economically sound sustainable waste management strategies, has been accepting #2 and #4 plastic shopping bags and recycling as many as it can recover since 2007. However, the recycling markets for plastic bags is very weak, and the technology used at ecomaine to separate paper and cardboard from the remaining plastic, metal and glass recyclables is not equipped to adequately handle the volume of plastic bags and film that come through the facility. On average, non-recyclable contamination comprises about 7.5 percent of the 42,000 tons of recycling that ecomaine typically processes annually. Plastic bags and films are estimated to comprise between 60% and 70% of these contaminants and end up as fuel in the waste-to-energy plant.

“Every day, no fewer than seven ecomaine recycling facility employees are required to climb into the sorting equipment to cut out the plastic bags and films that get wrapped around the recycling separation equipment. Sometimes, the contamination even requires shut downs mid-shift,” explained ecomaine Recycling Facility Manager John Morin. “This ensures optimal recovery of the recyclable materials, which cannot flow adequately past the plastic film jams and through the sorting equipment.”

The decision comes on the heels of several ecomaine owner communities, including Portland, South Portland and Falmouth, instituting plastic bag fees of five cents per plastic grocery bag. Freeport recently voted to ban plastic shopping bags altogether from all grocery and convenience stores, and instituted a five-cent fee on paper bags. These ordinances aim to reduce waste and incentivize shoppers to opt for reusable bags, thus reducing fossil fuel and natural resource consumption and our overall carbon footprint.

“We support movements across Maine to reduce our dependence on plastic shopping bags and also recognize that there are more ideal avenues established to ensure the best possible recovery of plastic bags and films from the waste stream,” said ecomaine Recycling Committee Chairman Caleb Hemphill.

As an alternative to reusable shopping bags, most major grocery stores and big box retailers have plastic bag recovery boxes set up in their stores, which are used to produce products such as recycled plastic lumber. Find a complete list of stores that will accept plastic bags and films near you at plasticfilmrecycling.org.

ecomaine is a community-owned sustainable waste management operator of a single-sort recycling facility, waste-to-energy plant, and food waste recovery transfer point in Portland.