

Plastic Bag and Plastic Film Recycling Guide: Findings from Store Visits in Ulster County, Phone Interviews, and Online Research

Plastic Bag and Plastic Film Recycling in New York State

- Nearly all of the plastic bags and plastic film used at home are recyclable and are covered under the [NY State Plastic Bag and Plastic Film Reduction, Recycling and Reuse Act](#).
- This act requires major stores and retailers in New York to provide collection points at their stores for recyclable plastic bags and film.
- Items covered include all single use plastic bags, with the exception of plastic bags designed specifically for frozen foods, and nearly all types of plastic film used in packaging, including shrink wrap (the type of wrap used to secure items in packaging – e.g. the plastic film used to wrap a cases of bottled water). Plastic “cling” wrap (aka Saran wrap), the stretchable film used to seal foods, is not recyclable through this program.
- “Fill Air Pillows” (which are growing in use by Amazon and other online retailers), are recyclable and, if deflated, essentially become like plastic bags. They should be accepted by stores in their drop off bins.
- Bubble wrap and plastic bubble envelopes/mailers are recyclable but are not covered by the NY State Plastic Bag and Plastic Film Act. Stores do not have to accept these items, and most grocery stores have chosen not to. (In general, bubble mailers with paper outsides are only recyclable if the paper is removed from the plastic bubble lining and recycled separately.)
- Many stores in the area have plastic bag and film drop off bins.

NY State Plastic Bag and Film Reduction, Recycling and Reuse Act

- All retailers with store space of 10,000 sq. ft. or more, and chain store branches of over 5,000 sq. ft. are required to recycle all types of plastic covered under the act. These stores *must accept plastic bags and film regardless of whether such items were purchased in their stores*. Stores must keep records showing that such items were ultimately recycled, and *stores are prohibited from disposing of such items in landfills*.
- Detailed information on what types of plastic bags and film a store is or isn’t required to recycle may be found on the [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation web page](#).

Stores are required to collect and recycle:

- Plastic retail bags with string ties and rigid plastic handles removed
- Plastic newspaper bags
- Plastic dry-cleaning bags
- Plastic produce bags with **all** food residue removed
- Plastic bread bags with **all** food residue removed

Plastic cereal bags with **all** food residue removed
Plastic wrap from paper products (paper towels, toilet paper, etc.)
Plastic stretch/shrink wrap with all food residue removed
Plastic zipper-type bags

Stores may accept these items:

Plastic bubble wrap
Plastic air pillows found inside shipping packages
Plastic shipping envelopes
Plastic from pellet bags with all residue removed

These Items Can Not be Recycled with Plastic Bags:

Plastic bags with strings, rigid plastic handles, or food residue
Plastic soil or mulch bags
Plastic frozen food bags
Plastic food containers
Plastic bottles

Stores Participating in the NY State Program

- There are online search tools that help locate stores with [plastic bag and film drop off points](#).
- Most large retailers in the area do indeed participate.
- Town of Shandaken Recycling Center: They accept at their location and send for recycling essentially the same items that County Waste picks up from the Monastery, albeit free of charge. They are open three mornings per week. They have a plastic bag collection bin but admitted that *they dispose of such bags in landfill!* They have a small bin for collecting bubble wrap, which is subsequently passed on to a small business owner for reuse in her business.

*Compiled by Steven Miron
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