

Woolworths trials the removal of plastic barrier bags

Woolworths has announced a 12-store trial to remove plastic barrier bags from its stores.



Image supplied

Kicking off on 8 April in four Cape-based Woolworths stores – Table Bay Mall, Waterstone Village, Platteklouf Village and Palmyra Junction – the eight-week trial will extend on 15 April to an additional eight stores across the Western Cape and Gauteng – N1 City Mall, Village Square, Canal Walk and Stellenbosch Square in the Cape, and Hazeldene Square, Harvest Place, Benmore Gardens and Maroun Square in Gauteng.

“At Woolies, we have a vision of zero packaging waste to landfill and have publicly committed to the removal of unnecessary and problematic plastics from our value chain,” says Feroz Koor, group head of sustainability.

“To deliver on our commitment, we have already removed plastic straws, plastic cutlery, plastic cotton bud sticks, plastic lollipop sticks, microbeads, and single-use shopping bags from all our stores. The barrier bag is the last problematic plastic on the SA Plastics Pact list that we need to remove and we are ready to work closely with our customers to eliminate it from our stores.”

Although plastic barrier bags are technically recyclable, they are deemed problematic as they are too thin to be viable for recyclers to recycle and are often contaminated with food or waste products so either end up littering our communities, rivers and oceans or going to landfill.



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Recognising the behavioural shift required, Koor acknowledges the convenience of barrier bags while affirming the Woolworths commitment to more sustainable alternatives.

“We understand the convenience that barrier bags offer, so we have been working on viable solutions like responsibly-sourced paper bags for loose fruit and vegetables in the trial stores, and absorbent mats in the fresh flowers area to catch any excess water. As part of our ongoing packaging improvements, we’ve also recently introduced rotisserie chicken packaging that is leakproof and thereby eliminating the need for a plastic barrier bag.”

Throughout the trial, Woolworths will conduct comprehensive research to assess customer and employee response, gauging the effectiveness of the paper bags, and gathering feedback on the removal of plastic barrier bags. Insights gleaned from this trial will inform future trials and facilitate the eventual removal of plastic barrier bags from all Woolworths stores.

“As one of our corporate partners, Woolworths is making strides in the implementation of practical solutions to address the plastic crisis,” says Lorren de Kock, senior manager: Circular Economy, WWF South Africa.

“Woolworths is also a member of the SA Plastics Pact, where it has been demonstrated that the industry can be a forerunner as a self-regulating collective to transition toward a circular plastics economy before national and global policy kicks in.”

With the removal of plastic barrier bags from all stores, Woolworths aims to remove 11 million plastic bags every year from polluting our environment, waterways and oceans, or from our landfills.

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