



Containers and Packaging Materials

Provincial Sales Tax Act

This bulletin provides information on how the provincial sales tax (PST) applies to containers, packaging materials, reusable containers and labels.

Table of Contents

Overview.....	1
Taxable Containers and Packaging Materials	2
Exempt Containers and Packaging Materials	3
Collecting PST on Containers and Packaging Materials.....	5
Labels	6
Production Machinery and Equipment Exemption	7

Overview

Containers and packaging materials include items such as bags, boxes and crates. Whether PST applies to these items depends on how they are used by a business and whether there is a charge to the customer for them.

Paying PST

Generally, you do not pay PST on containers and packaging materials (other than reusable containers) that you use in your business if you use them to package goods for sale or lease, or if you provide them to your customers with their purchases of goods.

However, you must pay PST on containers and packaging materials if you do **not** include them with your goods at the time the goods are sold or leased (e.g. using them to store, handle or ship goods). You also pay PST if you use them to provide a service (e.g. moving or courier services), or if you provide them to your customers at no charge and they are considered incidental to the provision of a service not subject to PST (e.g. clothing bags provided by dry cleaners).

Charging PST

If you charge your customers for containers and packaging materials, you must charge PST for the containers and packaging materials even if the goods or services themselves are not taxable. If you do **not** separately charge your customers for containers and packaging materials, you are generally not required to charge PST if the containers and packaging

materials are provided with goods or services that are not subject to PST. However, in limited circumstances, you may be required to charge PST on the fair market value of the containers and packaging materials.

In this bulletin, **obtain** means:

- purchased in BC,
- brought or sent into BC, or
- received in BC.

Taxable Containers and Packaging Materials

You must pay PST on containers and packaging materials if you use them for:

- storing goods you use in your business
- handling your goods before the goods are sold, where the containers and packaging materials are not included with the goods at the time of sale or lease (e.g. boxes and crates used within a warehouse or between distribution centres)
- shipping your goods between business locations, where the containers and packaging materials are not provided with the goods at the time of sale or lease (e.g. boxes used to package boxed keyboards to transport them to retail locations)
- providing a service, such as moving services (see the section below, Containers and Packaging Materials Used to Provide a Service)
- shipping goods that are being provided as promotional material. For more information on promotional materials, please see [Bulletin PST 311](#), *Promotional Materials*.

Reusable Containers

A **reusable container** is a container or pallet that is used to package or deliver goods, and is capable of being returned and reused.

The following are examples of reusable containers:

- barrels, drums, pallets and carboys
- cylinders that store compressed gas (e.g. oxygen and acetylene)

If you obtain reusable containers in BC, you must pay PST on the purchase price of the reusable container. This applies when you intend to sell your goods packaged or delivered in or on the reusable container, and you:

- charge a deposit, credit, penalty or replacement charge to encourage its return for reuse as a container,
- retain an interest in the reusable container after the sale of goods, and
- require the reusable container, or a similar reusable container, to be returned after the sale of goods, or if you sell the goods in a jurisdiction where the reusable container is subject to a regulatory or contractual scheme to recover the container for reuse by you or by other participants in the scheme.

This includes alcoholic beverage containers returnable to BC Liquor Stores and products subject to container recycling fees in BC. For more information on these recycling programs, please visit the websites for [BC Liquor Stores](#) and [Encorp](#).

Please note: Returnable and reusable milk bottles are an exception and are exempt from PST if they are used to hold milk products for retail sale.

Charges to Customers

If you charge a fee to your customer for the use of the reusable containers, you must charge PST to your customer on the fee. If you charge a penalty for late return, you must also charge PST on the late return charge.

If the goods that you are selling are subject to PST (e.g. liquor) and a container recycling fee, you must charge PST on the container recycling fee paid by your customer at the retail level because this fee forms part of the purchase price paid to receive the goods. The PST rate that you charge on the fee is the same as for the goods being purchased; therefore, if the goods are liquor, the PST rate is 10%.

If you charge a deposit on a reusable container to encourage its return, PST does **not** apply to the deposit.

Containers and Packaging Materials Used to Provide a Service

If you use containers and packaging materials to provide a service, such as a packaging service (other than gift wrapping), mailing, courier, freight or moving service, you must pay PST on the packaging materials you use in providing that service. This includes boxes, crates, foam chips, strapping, wrapping and bags.

For example, dry cleaners provide an exempt service to clothing, and generally do not charge for the bags and other packaging materials they use to protect the clothing before they are picked up by the customer. In this situation, the dry cleaners must pay PST on the bags and other packaging materials.

However, if you sell your customer the packaging materials first and then use those materials to provide the service, you may purchase the packaging materials (other than reusable containers) exempt from PST as they are purchased for resale. To obtain the exemption, you provide your PST number to your supplier or, if you are not registered, a *Certificate of Exemption – General* form ([FIN 490](#)). In this case, as you are selling the packaging materials, you must charge your customer PST on the packaging materials.

For more information on goods (other than containers and packaging materials) used in providing related services, please see [Bulletin PST 301](#), *Related Services*.

Exempt Containers and Packaging Materials

Containers and Packaging Materials Used to Package Goods for Sale

If you obtain containers and packaging materials (other than reusable containers) to package the goods you sell and provide them with your goods when sold, you may purchase the containers and packaging material exempt from PST. To obtain the exemption, you provide your PST number to your supplier or, if you are not registered, a *Certificate of Exemption – General* form ([FIN 490](#)).

For example, a manufacturer uses boxes to package cookies, cereal or crackers for sale. The manufacturer would not pay PST to their supplier on the purchase of the boxes.

If you make your own containers and packaging materials for use in packaging, shipping or delivering your goods sold, you may purchase the materials exempt from PST.

The following are examples of containers and packaging materials (other than reusable containers) that sellers of goods may purchase exempt from PST, provided that they are used to package goods for sale and are provided with goods at the time the goods are sold:

- airbags – included with the containers and packaging delivered to the customer
- bags and sacks – made of plastic or paper
- barrels, carboys and drums
- bottles – for packaging medication or vitamins
- boxes, cartons and crates
- dunnage materials – used to support and protect cargo during transport such as foam chips, paper and dunnage bags
- film print “wallet” envelopes – used to package finished film prints for the customer
- materials used to manufacture containers that become the property of the purchaser including nails, staples, cardboard, wood, glue, gummed tape or other products used to seal containers
- pallets
- pots of compressed peat moss, fibre, plastic and other materials used to facilitate the sale and delivery of plants
- restaurant take-out packaging and other food packaging (e.g. deli bags, bulk food bags, produce bags and bakery boxes)
- strapping wire – for bundling lumber for sale
- tape, twine and other materials – used for binding containers

Containers and Packaging Materials Used to Package Leased Goods

If you obtain containers and packaging materials that you use to package the goods you lease and provide them with the leased goods, you may purchase the containers and packaging materials exempt from PST. To obtain the exemption, you provide your PST number to your supplier or, if you are not registered, a *Certificate of Exemption – General* form ([FIN 490](#)).

The exemption applies even if the containers and packaging materials are reusable containers (e.g. DVD and video game cases provided with rented DVDs and video games), because the tax on reusable containers only applies if you intend to **sell** a product that is packaged or delivered in or on the reusable container.

Containers and Packaging Materials Provided With Goods or Services

If you obtain containers and packaging materials (other than reusable containers) that you provide to your customers with their purchase of goods or services, you may purchase the containers and packaging materials exempt from PST if:

- in the case of goods, you are reselling those containers and packaging materials to your customer as part of the purchase of the goods, whether or not you charge separately for them
- in the case of services, you sell the containers and packaging materials first and then use those materials to provide the service

This includes boxes, crates, foam chips, strapping, wrapping, and bags. To obtain the exemption, you provide your PST number to your supplier or, if you are not registered, a *Certificate of Exemption – General form* ([FIN 490](#)).

For example, a grocery store provides bags to their customers when they purchase groceries. The grocery store would not pay PST to their supplier on the purchase of the bags. See below to determine whether the grocery store is required to charge PST on the bags.

Collecting PST on Containers and Packaging Materials

If You Charge for Containers and Packaging Materials

If you separately charge your customer for containers and packaging materials, the charge is subject to PST even if the goods or services themselves are not subject to PST. This is because the charge relates to the purchase of taxable containers and packaging materials.

For example, a grocery store provides bags to their customers with their purchase of groceries and charges 15 cents per bag. The grocery store would be required to charge PST on the charges for the bags.

If You Do Not Charge for Containers and Packaging Materials

If you do not separately charge your customer for containers and packaging materials, and you provide them with goods or services that are subject to PST, you charge PST on the full purchase price of the goods or services.

If you do not separately charge your customer for containers and packaging materials, and you provide them with goods or services that are **not** subject to PST, you are generally not required to charge PST on the containers and packaging materials. In most cases, the containers and packaging materials are not taxable to your customers because they either qualify for the bundled sales exemption, or are considered incidental to the provision of a service that is not subject to PST (see below).

Bundled Sales Exemption

You do not collect PST on containers and packaging if all of the following criteria are met:

- the container and packaging materials are sold for a single price with a non-taxable good or service,
- the fair market value of the container or packaging material together with any other taxable good or service sold for the single price is \$50 or less and 10% or less of the fair market value of the taxable and non-taxable goods and services provided for a single price,
- the container and packaging materials are pre-packaged with a non-taxable good or service or you do not ordinarily sell the containers or packaging materials separately from the non-taxable component,
- the containers or packaging material are not being provided by way of promotional distribution, and
- none of the other goods sold for the single price are liquor, telecommunication services or legal services.

For more information, please see [Bulletin PST 316](#), *Bundled Sales: Taxable and Non-Taxable Goods or Services Sold Together for a Single Price*.

Incidental Containers and Packaging Materials for Services not Subject to PST

If you provide containers and packaging materials without a separate charge to your customer when you provide a service that is not subject to PST, you do not charge PST on the containers and packaging materials if:

- the main purpose of the contract is for your service and not for the containers and packaging materials,
- there is no separate charge for the containers and packaging materials, and
- the total price for the service, including the containers and packaging materials is the same as or only marginally different from the price you would charge if the containers and packaging materials were not provided.

You do not charge PST because the containers and packaging materials are not being sold and are only incidental to the service you are providing.

Please note: As the service provider, you must pay PST when you provide containers and packaging materials that are incidental to the services you are providing.

Collecting PST on the Fair Market Value

In limited circumstances, you are required to collect PST from your customers on the fair market value of the containers and packaging materials. These include circumstances where the containers and packaging materials do not qualify as incidental packaging materials or for the bundled sales exemption (see above).

Example 1 – Packaging Materials Do Not Qualify as Incidental Packaging Materials

A moving company provides a non-taxable moving service for a single price that includes providing boxes to their customers. The company also provides moving services for a lower price without providing boxes to their customers. Providing boxes with the moving service does not qualify as incidental packaging materials as the total price for the moving service with the boxes is not the same or is not only marginally different from the service without the boxes. The moving company would be required to charge their customer PST on the fair market value of the boxes provided as part of the moving service.

Example 2 – Bundled Sales Exemption Does not Apply

A retail store sells exempt goods such as children's clothing and provides gift boxes at no charge with the purchase of the clothing. The store also sells gift boxes separately to customers without the purchase of other goods. Providing gift boxes at no charge with the purchase of children's clothing does not qualify for the bundled sales exemption as the store ordinarily sells the gift boxes separately. The store would be required to charge PST on the fair market value of the gift boxes.

Labels

You may purchase labels exempt from PST if the labels are attached to and remain with the goods you sell or lease.

If you remove the labels from the goods at or before the time of sale or lease, you must pay PST on the labels.

Production Machinery and Equipment Exemption

If you manufacture your own containers and packaging materials, you may qualify for the production machinery and equipment (PM&E) exemption on the machinery and equipment used to manufacture the containers and packaging materials, provided all the requirements for the exemption are met.

For more information on the PM&E exemption, please see [Bulletin PST 110, Production Machinery and Equipment Exemption](#).



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The information in this bulletin is for your convenience and guidance and is not a replacement for the legislation.

For up to date information on the return to PST, subscribe to our What's New page at sbr.gov.bc.ca/msbr/whats_new/consumer_taxes/whatsnew.htm

References: *Provincial Sales Tax Act*, sections 1, “reusable container”, 101 and 141; Provincial Sales Tax Exemption and Refund Regulation, sections 43 and 92.