



City's plastic bag ordinance will help educate consumers

By [Carol West](#), Inside Tucson Business
Published on Wednesday, July 08, 2009

On Sept. 24, an ordinance will go into effect in the city of Tucson requiring plastic bag recycling by retail establishments operating more than 10,000 square feet of retail space at two or more locations.

Restaurants are exempt.

Here is how the ordinance will work: a customer will take clean plastic dry cleaners bags, sandwich bags, and retail plastic bags (other than those that are colored black or red) to a store where there will be a collection receptacle for them.

Trucks belonging to the retail stores take the bags to warehouses in Phoenix where they are then collected and sent to manufacturing plants making sturdy plastic playground equipment and outdoor decks. There is a growing demand for plastic film, according to Andrew Quigley, director of Tucson Environmental Services.

Retail stores will be required to provide reusable carryout bags for purchase; they will also have to report to Environmental Services twice a year on the total number of carry-out plastic bags by weight that are recycled.

Pima Association of Governments (PAG) estimates that 182 million plastic bags are distributed in metropolitan Tucson each year. Plastic bags are made from petroleum derivatives. According to Wilson Hughes, a waste reduction planner with Environmental Services, reusing or recycling one ton of plastic bags (132,000 bags) will save the energy equivalent of 11 barrels of oil. If Tucson's recycling of bags reaches 10 percent per year, that would save the equivalent of 1,517 barrels of oil.

Plastic bags are reusable and some consumers find many uses for them, including food storage, bagging clothes for travel, picking up after animals, etc. However, it is not uncommon to see plastic bag "birds" flying through the air, littering the landscape. This nuisance has prompted city officials to do something about the problem.

The City of Tucson worked closely with the Phoenix-based Arizona Food Marketing Alliance (AFMA) to develop the new ordinance. Tim McCabe, president of AFMA, says Flagstaff, Maricopa County and Kingman have all adopted similar ordinances. The program has won an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional award. Other states have inquired about the program.

McCabe says consumers want to do the right thing and they will recycle if it is easy and they know what to do. Educating customers will signal the success of this program. Stores will have reduce, reuse, and recycle messages on the plastic bag itself so folks are aware of the program. Retailers will also have information available on the environmental benefits of recycling plastic bags: greenhouse gas reduction, energy savings, and litter reduction. City efforts to educate consumers about the ordinance will begin later this summer.

Retailers who are wondering if they are included in the ordinance, can call Environmental Services at (520) 791-3175. Letters will be sent to retailers about the new ordinance requirements, according to Andrew Quigley.

There has been a trend among California cities and elsewhere towards banning plastic bags altogether. While this

would certainly save even more energy, it is unrealistic because the ban is not easily enforced. The Tucson ordinance will make consumers more aware of options such as using cloth bags or finding ways to reuse plastic bags so they are not aflutter in the air or at the landfill.

To view the ordinance online, go to the City of Tucson's website:

www.ci.tucson.az.us/agdocs/2009324/mar24-09-164.pdf

Contact Carol West at cwwfoster@aol.com. West served on the Tucson City Council from 1999-2007 and before that worked as a council aide from 1987-1995.

Copyright © 2009 Inside Tucson Business