

PALO ALTO DAILY NEWS

Bring your own bags

New city program designed to encourage reusable bags

By Melanie Carroll / Daily News Staff Writer

Palo Alto aims to reduce the number of plastic and paper bags shoppers use through a new campaign designed to encourage people to bring their own reusable bags.

The so-called BYOBag! campaign already has some retail outlets signed on to the pilot program that will give stores free advertising in exchange for their participation.

"Protecting the earth's resources is a great concern of mine. Global warming is real, yet we tend to become complacent, forgetting to recycle and reuse," said Dennis Garcia, owner of the College Avenue JJ&F Market, in a prepared statement. "Protecting the environment needs to begin somewhere. By supporting and participating in the BYOBag! Campaign, our business is making a difference in saving the earth for future generations."

The campaign being coordinated by the Public Works Recycling Program is designed to educate and assist shoppers in halting their use of the single-use bags. For one thing, the rarely recycled plastic bags are a major contributor to an enormous mass of plastic floating in the Pacific Ocean about 1,000 miles west of San Francisco. Scientists estimate it weighs several tons and is roughly twice the size of Texas. Plastic dumped in nearby Bay Area waters can drift out to it. Additionally, paper bags create waste and litter and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, the city reported.

A survey of Palo Alto shoppers concluded that grocery shoppers use their own sacks less than 10 percent of the time while only 2 percent of pharmacy consumers do the same. Country Sun Natural Foods banned the plastic bags this month while Whole Foods won't use them after April 22 - Earth Day.

Inside JJ&F, the longtime grocer for the Stanford and College Terrace neighborhoods, reusable cloth maroon bags with navy trim are on sale to those who want to avoid paper or plastic. Outside a container filled with thousands of plastic bags collects the white plastic bags that might otherwise end up in a landfill, stuck to a tree branch or in the ocean.

On Saturday afternoon, as raindrops poured from the sky, Terry Fayer carted out groceries in the reusable maroon bags.

Fayer said she's bought them last summer, when they went on sale, in an effort to preserve the environment.

Still, not everyone is as devoted to helping the planet.

"Using canvas bags is ridiculous," said Cole Gordon, who sat with a few friends outside the JJ&F Market on Saturday before the rain started pouring down.

Gordon, who hails from Mississippi, said people from his home state would make fun of anyone carrying groceries in a canvas bag instead of plastic.

His friend Sheyi Ayeni, a San Francisco resident, said most people don't care about avoiding the plastic bags.

Last March, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors banned plastic bags although paper bags are still permitted.

"It's a hassle in life just for one sack" to bring your own bag, Ayeni said

Shoppers should be given a choice and incentive to use environmentally friendly bags, his friend Will McColl said outside the market.

"I try to use my own bag when possible," McColl said. "People should have the option" to use a sack of their own choice.

Retailers have until March 7 to enroll in the city-sponsored BYOBag! campaign, which runs from April 1 to Dec. 31. Those who participate will likely offer incentives to customers who use environmentally friendly bags, offer reusable bags for sale and place posters and signs in stores. For more information, go to www.cityofpaloalto.org/BYOBAG.

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