

SCIENCE

Plastic Bag Ban Takes Effect in Much of San Mateo County

by Nina Thorsen | April 22, 2013 — 8:06 AM



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Nina Thorsen/KQED

Shoppers in much of San Mateo County no longer have a choice between paper and plastic.

Starting Monday, which is Earth Day, plastic bags are banned at grocery stores and other retailers in Belmont, Brisbane, Burlingame, Colma, Daly City, Foster City, Half Moon Bay, Menlo Park, Pacifica, Portola Valley, San Bruno and South San Francisco.

Paper bags will cost 10 cents.

The county's environmental health director, Dean Peterson, says there's a learning curve for both customers and clerks.

The last batch of single-use plastic bags at the Burlingame Safeway on Sunday.

"When I'm out shopping, people often ask, 'Do you want a bag with that?'" he says. "So they're starting to do that. We're pretty good about it in grocery stores, but in retail markets it will cause a little

bit of retraining."

On Sunday, clerks at the Burlingame Safeway reminded customers about the change as they put groceries in the last of the store's plastic bags.

Peterson and his staff have been conducting a multilingual outreach campaign to get merchants up to speed. Enforcement of the ban will be based on tips from a hotline and some spot checks. The intent isn't to be punitive, he says, but everyone needs to take part to make the bag ban work.

Other cities in San Mateo County are phasing out the bags later in the year: San Mateo and San Carlos this summer, and Redwood City and East Palo Alto in October. Millbrae has already banned the bags.