

## Azusa to curb bag use

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There's something twice the size of Texas floating just north of the Hawaiian Islands, but it's no tropical resort.

It's a pile of human litter, mostly plastic, swirling in what marine scientists know as the North Pacific Gyre, where all the ocean's currents converge. And officials say its testament to an enormous pollution problem.

Monday night, Azusa followed the lead of Los Angeles County and became one of a growing number of local and national governments to begin curbing the use of plastic bags, seen as both a blight issue and environmental threat.

"We have to think about pollution and the impacts on sea animals," said Azusa mayor Joe Rocha. "It's a small step, but it is one step."

China, Ireland and South Africa have implemented tough measures, either banning free, carry-out plastic bags or imposing per-bag fees. San Francisco in 2007 was the first U.S. city to ban plastic bags.

The county approved a program in January requiring large grocery stores, retailers and pharmacies to reduce plastic bag usage by 30 percent in 2010 and 65 percent by 2013, or face prohibitions on plastic bags or per-bag fees.

"The Board of Supervisors can only implement it in the unincorporated areas," said Coby Skye, county associate civil engineer. "We want to implement it county-wide, so we sent a letter to all the cities in L.A. County, asking them to implement the program."

Skye said the eventual goal is to phase out plastic bag use.

L.A. County residents use billions of plastic bags annually, officials said, and less than 5 percent are recycled.

"We've seen more and more plastic bags lining the rivers, the parks and beaches," said Sarah Abramson, director of coastal resources for Heal the Bay. "The solution is relatively simple because there are items such as reusable bags."

Abramson said plastic bags can kill marine animals, who easily mistake them for food and eat them, clogging their digestive tracts. Animals can also become entangled in the bags, she added.

Azusa officials approved a resolution to implement the county program Monday, and will soon vote on an ordinance. Officials are considering producing their own city-branded reusable bags.

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