

Malibu to require big stores to cease using plastic bags within 6 months

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An ordinance unanimously adopted by Malibu's City Council this week will soon make plastic bags a thing of the past among its 13,000 residents and four supermarkets.

The measure will apply to all retailers, including grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacies and city facilities, which will have about six months to comply, or face a fine of up to \$1,000. Smaller vendors will have up to a year.

The action follows a number of other efforts in California to ban plastic bags. In February, Santa Monica's City Council voted to draft an ordinance that would ban plastic bags and to consider a fee for paper bags.

In March 2007, San Francisco's County Board of Supervisors voted to ban non-biodegradable plastic bags at supermarket chains with more than \$2 million in annual sales and other major retailers. It was believed to be the first such ban in the country.

Environmental groups hailed Malibu's ordinance as a model that they hoped others would emulate, to keep the bags from clogging storm drains and drifting to sea, where they can kill marine life.

"Even though there's only a couple grocery stores in Malibu, the average American is using over 600 plastic bags annually, and so, it makes a big difference," said Sarah Abramson, director of coastal resources for Heal the Bay, a regional environmental group. "When cities like Malibu take action on these types of issues, it can be held up as a leader for other cities to move forward with similar action."

Californians use about 19 billion plastic shopping bags annually, and Los Angeles County residents account for about a third of that, according to Heal the Bay. It costs California taxpayers about \$25 million a year to collect and dispose of plastic bags, according to Californians Against Waste.

"If you live down here and you take a walk down the beach, or you're a surfer, the concern is that we're polluting

our waters, ruining our beaches with this pollution," said Malibu Councilwoman Sharon Barovsky.

Dave Heylen, a spokesman for the California Grocers Assn., a trade group for the food industry, said the ban skirted the real issue: trying to get consumers to change their habits and switch to reusable bags. He said most stores would probably just use paper instead of plastic.

"Our contention is, instead of shifting bag use from one type to another, that we actually put together an effective plan that would [get] these bags out of the waste stream," Heylen said.

Last summer, a statewide recycling bill went into effect that requires large California grocery stores and pharmacies to collect and recycle plastic bags, and to sell reusable bags.

At the Monday night meeting, Malibu Mayor Pamela Conley Ulich asked the city's staff to study imposing a fee on paper bags to encourage people to bring reusable bags.

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