

## Watsonville bags plastic carryalls: City joins county in new retail rules

By Donna Jones - Santa Cruz Sentinel Santa Cruz Sentinel

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SantaCruzSentinel.com

WATSONVILLE - Get used to bringing your own bag to the supermarket.

The City Council voted Tuesday to ban retail stores from handing out plastic bags to carry purchases and to charge a fee for paper bags.

Before the vote Mayor Eduardo Montesino pulled out a stuffed seabird snared in a plastic bag.

"This is not only for us, but for our environment," Montesino said. "This is what we're going to save."

The city joins more than 200 communities across California in banning the plastic bags, which often end up as litter on streets or in waterways putting wildlife at risk.

It's the first city in Santa Cruz County to impose a ban, though one went into effect in the unincorporated area of the county in March. Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley are considering bans. Capitola was looking at the issue, but postponed a decision in the face of the threat of litigation. However, 10 businesses in that city, including four large grocery stores, voluntarily decided to stop handing out plastic bags

Laura Kasa of Save Our Shores told the council the county ban is working. Surveys of Safeway stores found only 10 percent of customers brought reusable bags to carry their groceries home before the ban. A month into the new rules, 80 percent are bringing their own bags or "putting their Triscuits in their purses."

"It wasn't a tough transition," she said.

But Councilwoman Nancy Bilicich worried the ban would go into effect too quickly and she opposed forcing consumers to pay for paper bags. She said some stores have already started charging in advance of the new ordinance. She voted no.

"We've always had paper bags and they didn't charge for them," she said.

The bag ban will go into effect in three months. For the first year, stores will be required to charge 10 cents for paper bags. After a year, the charge will go up to 25 cents.

Restaurants will still be allowed to use plastic bags for take-out. Plastic also may be used to bag greeting cards, produce, meat, ice cream, and other wet items.