



SANTA MONICA MOVES TO BAN PLASTIC BAGS

Nation's strongest ordinance would also impose fees on paper bags

Santa Monica, CA (Wednesday, February 27, 2008) -- The Santa Monica City Council today voted unanimously to draft a precedent-setting ordinance that would forbid the distribution of all single-use plastic shopping bags within city limits.

Marking what would be the most comprehensive legislation to date nationally, the council may also require store owners to charge shoppers a fee if they request a paper bag. By focusing on *both* plastic and paper bags at *any* point of sale, the city has taken decisive action to encourage consumers to bring their own reusable totes.

More than two dozen nations and metropolitan areas have recently enacted limited bans on plastic bags, including China, San Francisco and Paris. Environmental activists hope that Santa Monica's strong ordinance can serve as a model for other progressive cities seeking to curtail the proliferation of single-use bags – both paper and plastic and at retailers of every size and function.

“The city of Santa Monica can be proud to be once again at the forefront of sustainable public policy,” said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay, the Santa Monica-based environmental group. “It’s time for all Southland residents to make the common-sense switch to reusable bags.”

Heal the Bay has waged a yearlong fight to curb use of one-use plastic bags, which clog landfills, litter our public spaces, squander energy and threaten marine life. California taxpayers spend more than \$25 million a year to collect and dispose of the 19 billion one-use plastic shopping bags distributed annually. The biggest grocery stores in Santa Monica alone use approximately 23 million plastic bags each year.

While paper bags are largely biodegradable and do not foul the marine environment, the bags come with an environmental price tag. Their creation emits global warming gases, pollutes watersheds and requires significant amounts of raw materials. Less than 20% of paper and 5% of plastic bags are recycled.

Paper bags would be allowed in the city, if they meet to-be-determined thresholds for recyclability and post-consumer content. Staff will come back with recommendations on the amount of any per-bag fee.

Several prominent business owners in Santa Monica expressed support for the ordinance, including the Fred Segal suite of boutique stores, the Urth Café, and the Border Grill restaurant. Staff is recommending that retailers would have six months to make the transition.

The council has asked staff to research and draft an ordinance for its first reading and possible final vote in 60-90 days.

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