

# Manhattan Beach City Council is the first in South Bay to ban plastic sacks

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Despite looming litigation from an industry lobbying group, the Manhattan Beach City Council unanimously banned plastic bags in town, becoming the first South Bay community to pass such a prohibition.

After the ban goes into effect in August, food vendors, pharmacies and city facilities will have six months to phase out point-of-sale plastic bags; other establishments get a year.

Enthusiastic council members Tuesday said the ban would reduce the visual and environmental pollution partially caused by petroleum-based plastic bags in the city's landscape and coastal waters.

"We have a serious litter problem as a result of plastic bags," Councilman Nick Tell said. "It's a litter problem in our streets and it's also in the ocean."

Councilman Mitch Ward believed the council had a responsibility to young Manhattan Beach residents to protect the city's pristine coastline.

"Our children are watching, and they want to know what we're going to do as caretakers of our environment," he said. "The city of Manhattan Beach has to do all that it can in its power to keep plastic out of the ocean."

An organized group of about eight plastic retailers and manufacturers will file suit against Manhattan Beach in the next 30 days or so, its attorney Stephen Joseph said Wednesday.

The group, Save the Plastic Bag Coalition, argued that Manhattan Beach should have conducted a full analysis of the ban's possible environmental impact

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as required under the California Environmental Quality Act.

Instead, the city performed an initial study that found the prohibition would have no adverse effect on the environment, which city officials believed was sufficient and would hold up in court.

"I think it stands an excellent chance in withstanding a lawsuit," City Attorney Bob Wadden said.

Said Councilman Jim Aldinger on Tuesday: "I know we will prevail when we do get sued, thank you very much."

Manhattan Beach's ban was modeled after an ordinance passed by the city of Malibu in May. San Francisco has also banned plastic bags, though it allows for compostable carriers.

Several residents, environmental leaders and business owners urged Manhattan Beach officials to join those cities and move forward with a ban Tuesday.

"What you and Malibu are doing is moving you ahead of other places in the country," said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay.

Some opponents of the ban have argued that eliminating plastic bags as an option in stores would only lead to the proliferation and littering of paper bags.

But council members were confident that Manhattan residents and business owners would instead make reusable bags their hauling method of choice.

"The ordinance is not about transitioning from plastic to paper," Councilwoman Portia Cohen said. "It's about transitioning from paper or plastic to reusable bags."

Already, about 40 percent of customers at the Ralphs supermarket on Sepulveda Boulevard carry home groceries in reusable canvas or nylon bags, its manager estimated this week.

"The age-old question of paper versus plastic is the wrong question," Gold said.

Despite expectations of high compliance rates, Manhattan Beach city officials will launch an aggressive campaign to educate about the ban and alternatives to plastic bags.

"This is a change that many in this community are willing to make, and some already have," said Lindy Coe-Juell, the city staffer who guided the ban.

Several audience members brought reusable totes to Tuesday's meeting, and resident Heather George jingled overhead a bundle of reusable bags each folded to about the size of a deck of cards.

"Behavior change is the issue here," she said.

And nothing spurs a change in behavior like the long arm of the law.

Police officers could hand out citations for violating the ban - a misdemeanor that would carry a fine, Wadden said.

Council members Tuesday also informally supported investigating a tax or fee on paper bags, as well as posting signs encouraging paper partakers to recycle.

They agreed that banning plastic bags would be just one of many steps in Manhattan Beach's renewed commitment this year to the environment.

"This is not wishful, fantastical thinking from a bunch of greenies," Cohen said.

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