

City is second in SoCal to ban plastic bags

By Dawnya Pring

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The familiar grocery store question, "Paper or plastic?" will soon be history in Manhattan Beach.

The City Council unanimously voted to ban businesses from using carryout plastic bags at its July 1 meeting, citing environmental concerns. The ordinance bans all point-of-sale carryout plastic bags in the city and will take effect for grocery stores, food vendors, restaurants, pharmacies and city facilities in six months; and one year for all other retail businesses and vendors, according to the staff report.

This is the second time that Manhattan Beach officials took a look at banning plastic bags. They were set to approve a ban at an earlier meeting until the effort was thwarted by a potential lawsuit threat by the "Save the Plastic Bag Coalition," a group of plastic bag manufacturers and distributors.

Opponents of the ban, from the plastics industry and related businesses, claim that banning plastic will only increase the demand on paper bag usage; and argue that paper bags are more costly, generate pollutants during manufacturing, and require more energy to produce and recycle.

But despite these arguments and the threat of a lawsuit made by Stephen Joseph, a lawyer representing the coalition, the plastic bag ban not only had support from council members, but also appeared to have wide community support from residents and environmental activists who attended the meeting, none of whom were convinced by arguments that plastic bags did not harm the environment as much as had been reported.

"Convenience isn't the answer," said Councilman Nick Tell, adding that people must learn new ways of shopping and living in order to preserve the environment and keep the beaches clean. "We have to make changes."

With this ban, Manhattan Beach joins Malibu as the only cities in Southern California to ban all point-of-sale plastic bags, meaning both compostable and noncompostable, at all retail establishments. The city of Santa Monica is currently considering a ban as comprehensive as the ones in both Manhattan and Malibu, according to a staff report by Lindy Coe-Juell, assistant to the city manager.

Within California, the cities of San Francisco and Oakland have passed ordinances to ban the distribution of nonbiodegradable plastic bags. The San Francisco ordinances apply only to supermarkets with gross annual sales of \$2 million or more, or retail pharmacies with at least five locations in the city under the same ownership. The Oakland ordinance applies to retail establishments, excluding restaurants with gross annual sales of \$1 million or more.



A shopping cart full of plastic grocery bags at Ralphs in Manhattan Beach. (photo by Chris Miller)