

Alameda County plastic bag ban begins next year

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Grocery shoppers in Alameda County will have to bring their own bags beginning in January next year or pay a dime for them under a plan approved Wednesday. And by July they'll have to start putting their paper and bottles sorted into recycling bins.

The Waste Management Authority board voted during its regular meeting to move forward with a plastic bag ban, which requires retailers that sell packaged or fresh food to charge 10 cents per bag instead of handing them out for free to customers. The bags will have to be made from recyclable paper or be reusable.

Sit-down and takeout restaurants, clothing retailers and other nonfood-related stores are exempt from the plan that kicks in January 2013. Cities can opt out by March 2, 2012.

The board also voted to make recycling mandatory beginning July 1, 2012. Businesses that produce four or more cubic yards of solid waste a week and multifamily owners will have to sort their paper, cardboard, food and beverage containers and a variety of similar materials.

Cities can decide they do not want to participate in Alameda County's specific plan by March 2, 2012, but state law will still require them to recycle specific materials. The plan expands to mandatory composting in July 2014. For more information, go to **www.stopwaste.org**.