

Coupons nudge residents to check out reusable bags

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Aiming to cut down on litter, Palo Alto is giving out coupons for reusable shopping bags.

The coupons are good for two-for-one deals and similar discounts on bags at six local stores, including Whole Foods and Mollie Stone's. The city is providing the businesses with free advertising in exchange for offering the deals.

Palo Alto is nearing the end of a campaign that began in April to increase reusable bag use in the city by 30 percent by the end of the year. A survey earlier this year showed less than 10 percent of Palo Alto shoppers use reusable bags at grocery stores, and less than 2 percent at pharmacies.

The city is eyeing an all-out ban on plastic bags, possibly coupled with a tax on paper bags. But before it takes that step, it's hoping to nudge residents and retailers toward reusable bags through voluntary programs.

Without a reusable bag, a single shopper can go through more than 500 disposable bags per year, said Annette Puskarich, coordinator of the city's Zero Waste program.

The stores offering "buy one, get one free" coupons are Whole Foods, Mollie Stone's and Country Sun Natural Foods. Country Sun stopped carrying plastic bags in February.

Palo Alto Hardware is giving out a free bag with

every \$20 purchase. Walgreens is offering one free bag to customers who buy five. Curves' Palo Alto South location is offering a free bag when customers enroll in a free one-month trial membership.

The city is sending the coupons to residents in their December utility bills. They're also available at the participating stores and online at <http://www.cityofpalalto.org/byobag>

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