

San Carlos becomes latest Peninsula city to ban plastic carryout bags

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San Carlos has joined a growing list of cities that outlaw plastic carryout bags.

The city council voted 4-1, with Mayor Matt Grocott dissenting, to adopt an ordinance modeled after one created by San Mateo County.

The ordinance, which takes effect July 1, aims to reduce the number of plastic bags that clog up storm drain systems and end up polluting waterways, Assistant City Manager Brian Moura told the council. By replicating the county's ordinance, San Carlos won't have to do a separate environmental impact report and can rely on the county to handle education outreach and enforcement aspects of the new law.

Grocott cited several concerns about the ban, with his "number one" being potential health risks to people who don't wash reusable bags. He also noted that other litter is more prevalent than plastic bags.

"I think we're focusing on the wrong thing, and I think the only reason why we are focusing on it is it's the politically popular thing to do and there's a push going on and the countywide deal and that's why we're doing it," Grocott said.

According to the ordinance, stores cannot offer plastic bags to customers and must charge those who don't bring their own recyclable bags a dime for each paper bag it supplies them -- a charge that would go up to 25 cents starting on Jan. 1, 2015.

Ten San Mateo County cities have already adopted the ban and eight other cities are considering doing the same, Moura told the council. In Santa Clara County, Mountain View and Cupertino have adopted similar laws and several other cities may follow.

The Redwood City council will consider a plastic bags ban at its March 11 meeting. Though many San Mateo County cities plan to begin implementing the ban on April 22 to coincide with Earth Day, San Carlos will wait until July 1 to give businesses time to deplete their stock of plastic bags, Moura said.

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