

## San Francisco votes to sack plastic bags

By John Ritter, USA TODAY

SAN FRANCISCO — This city that touts its environmental credentials got a little "greener" on Tuesday.

The Board of Supervisors voted 10-1 to require about 100 of the city's largest grocery stores and pharmacies to use only biodegradable plastic bags or recyclable paper bags.

That means San Francisco is likely to become the first major city in the USA to ban the conventional plastic bags, which are made from petroleum, at large stores. Environmentalists say those bags litter the landscape, threaten sea life, clog recycling machines and take up landfill space.

"We applaud them because they're setting a new standard and being a leader in this movement," said Stephanie Barger, executive director of Earth Resource Foundation, which advocates responsible environmental choices.

Dave Heylen, a spokesman for the California Grocers Association, said some San Francisco stores may skirt the plastic issue and offer only recyclable paper bags. The group opposed the legislation because of the cost of the biodegradable bags.

Plastic bags that can be composted, which are made from corn or potato starches, cost 6 cents to 10 cents each, compared with 3 cents apiece for paper bags, Heylen said. Conventional plastic bags cost 1 cent apiece.

The idea behind the measure was to urge residents to compost food waste by getting them to dump it into the biodegradable plastic bags, then put the bags in recycling containers along with yard waste.

Whether more cities follow San Francisco is uncertain because it is one of the few in the country that composts commercial and residential food waste.

"San Francisco is in a unique position to pull this off," said Mark Murray, executive director of the Sacramento-based Californians Against Waste.

Gary Liss, a consultant who advocates "zero waste," said about 45 communities, mostly in California, compost food waste, although "many places are exploring it."

Mayor Gavin Newsom said he would sign the new ordinance.

A state law that will take effect July 1 requires retailers to provide containers for customers to recycle plastic bags, print a recycling message on bags and offer reusable bags for sale.

The city's ban on conventional plastic bags is to take effect in six months for the grocery stores and in one year for the drugstores.

About 100 billion plastic bags are sold around the world each year, according to the Progressive Bag Alliance, whose members are leading bag manufacturers.

Last year, 32 San Francisco stores, in an agreement with the city, cut their use of plastic bags by 7.6 million.

"If we could get everyone to buy in, imagine the kind of numbers we could reach," Heylen, of the grocer's association, said.

But a mandatory measure was needed after the voluntary deal fell short, said city Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, who sponsored the new legislation.

"It was clear the grocery industry's heart wasn't into this agreement," he said.

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