

## Plastic grocery bag, foam container bans could be coming to Central County

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Paper or plastic? That could become an outdated question in some Central Contra Costa cities.

And if asked at an eatery, "Would you like a box to take that home?" you may be surprised what happens if you say yes. The Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority's board of directors today will consider banning plastic grocery bags and plastic foam containers.

A ban on bags would apply only to single-use carry-out bags at grocery store check stands, not bags used in produce sections, authority program manager Lois Courchaine said.

Alternatives to plastic grocery bags include paper bags, biodegradable bags and reusable cloth bags.

If plastic foam containers are banned, restaurants could use boxes made of paper, rigid plastic or even cornstarch, according to the report.

The board last year requested details about the benefits, drawbacks and logistics of the bans, Courchaine said. The agency's staff has no position on the two bans, she added.

The authority covers Danville, Lafayette, Moraga, Orinda, Walnut Creek and unincorporated parts of the county.

Because of their light weight, plastic bags in particular often find their way into creeks and other waterways, Courchaine said in her report, and a ban could help lower cleanup costs for cities and counties.

The regional water quality control board has mandated that Bay Area cities and counties reduce trash in waterways by 40 percent over five years, said Rinta Perkins, clean water program manager for Walnut Creek. Plastic grocery bags, she said, are one of the more common pieces of litter in the city's

creeks.

"I think (a ban would) take the load off from us having to clean up, certainly," she said.

Several Bay Area cities, including San Francisco, Berkeley, Alameda and Oakland, have banned plastic foam containers. Richmond also has banned the containers, but its ordinance does not go into effect until July 1. In addition, San Francisco has enacted a plastic grocery bag ban.

Oakland's bag ban was met with a lawsuit by a group of plastic bag manufacturers called the Coalition to Support Plastic Bag Manufacturing, who argue that a formal environmental review of the ban is necessary.

Several other cities' plastic bans are on hold while they wait for such a review to take place.

Green Cities California, a coalition of 10 local government agencies that promotes single-use plastic bag bans, reported this month that although paper bags have a higher environmental effect than plastic ones, paper is more frequently recycled.

State law requires grocery stores to provide recycling bins for plastic bags.

Diablo Foods in Lafayette has both the bins and reusable cloth and paper bags, but not biodegradable ones.

Owner Ed Stokes said although paper bags are more expensive than plastic ones, he would not object to a ban.

"We could make it work if it's environmentally good," he said. "I don't care. I'd rather keep (plastic bags) and recycle them, but if they throw them out it's OK with me."