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Plastic shopping bag ban begins in Santa Monica

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The city of Santa Monica's ban on plastic shopping bags took effect Wednesday with supermarkets, convenience stores, liquor stores and pharmacies barred from handing out single-use plastic bags.

A six-month grace period will be in place before enforcement kicks in, with fines starting at \$75 per infraction. Criminal prosecution is possible for repeat offenders.

Recyclable paper bags will still be available in stores for 10 cents apiece.

[Updated at 9:39 a.m.: Other types of stores, such as department, clothing and hardware, do not have to charge for their bags, but they are restricted in the types of plastic bags they can hand out, said Josephine Miller, an environmental analyst for the city.]

The city's ban follows similar initiatives in other upscale communities, including Malibu and San Francisco.

But the seaside town, known as a green mecca, is actually far behind other, less glittery locales with bag bans of several years' standing, including Bangladesh (2002), Kangaroo Valley, Australia (2003), and Corsica (1999), according to the city's website.

The Ralphs grocery store in Santa Monica expects little resistance to the ban. Assistant manager June Kim said 30% to 40% of their customers already bring their own reuseable totes to shop.

It could be a bit tough for customers who arrive on foot from nearby apartment complexes, he conceded. In another bid to reduce waste the stores' paper bags have no handles, Kim said.

"I'm sure people will be a little irritated," he said. "But we've heard a lot of positive comments. I think it will be OK."