

## Redwood City ready to ban plastic bags

September 30, 2013, 05:00 AM By [Michelle Durand](#) Daily Journal

Redwood City bag fans, better stock up.

Starting Tuesday, Redwood City joins numerous other Peninsula cities in putting the kibosh on free single-use plastic and paper bags at most retail establishments. Unlike the 12 cities and county that launched the ban in April to coincide with Earth Day, Redwood City pushed off its start date until October to allow businesses and patrons more time to prepare for the change. On its heels, East Palo Alto's ban takes effect Wednesday, Oct. 2.

The ordinances allow patrons without reusable bags to request a single-use paper version from retailers for the price of first a dime and, after Jan. 1, 2015, a quarter. Retailers can voluntarily choose to give free bags to food stamp and WIC participants.

The 10-cent fee is not taxable so cities and the county see nothing from the sales, said county Environmental Health Director Dean Peterson.

The fee is meant to act as an incentive against purchasing bags and help businesses recoup any costs associated with the mandated record keeping of bag sales. The fee also covers the cost of retailers advertising and purchasing pricier paper bags for sale. Paper can run 8 cents to 15 cents each which is the main reasons businesses turned to the much cheaper plastic option, Peterson said.

Some retailers are even putting the change in a tip-type jar and donating the proceeds to charity to avoid the appearance of turning a profit, he said.

Bags without handles for medicine and newspapers or to segregate food that might contaminate are exempt as are nonprofits such as Goodwill. Restaurants can still send food in to-go bags as public health officials haven't yet ruled out the possibility of reusable bags leading to cross-contamination.

Under the ordinance, a plastic bag 2.25 millimeters or thicker is considered a reusable bag and stores can provide them either free or for a fee.

Of the four complaints the county has received on bag bans since April, Peterson said three were actually inquiries about the thicker type offered. A Daly City corporate retailer was discovered using the wrong type of bag but avoided fines by switching them out.

The Redwood City Council approved its ban in March with a six-month ramp-up period although affected businesses were allowed to implement the ordinance prior to October. Peterson said doing so was a business decision which some corporate outlets did to maintain consistency of training and bag purchases.

The environmental impact report conducted prior to the vote concluded that an estimated 400 million single-use plastic bags are used annually in San Mateo County included approximately 42 million in Redwood City. Only a small percentage are recycled and the majority end up in landfills or as litter, according to the EIR.

The EIR concluded that Redwood City could potentially cut its plastic bag use by 95 percent if it implemented the ban.

All of the ordinances are modeled on the county's template which was crafted after a lengthy environmental review process meant to head off any legal challenge. Prohibitions are already in place in San Mateo County and the cities of Burlingame, Daly City, Colma, Brisbane, South San Francisco, San Bruno, San Mateo, San Carlos, Pacifica, Portola Valley, Half Moon Bay, Foster City, Belmont and Menlo Park. Millbrae passed its own ordinance.

On the other end of the spectrum, the town of Woodside passed on voting on a ban.

San Mateo County, which funded the environmental impact report on the ban, is in charge of education and enforcement countywide.

Violations can be reported at 372-6200.

[michelle@smdailyjournal.com](mailto:michelle@smdailyjournal.com)

(650) 344-5200 ext. 102

