

## Los Angeles Wave

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# County to ban plastic shopping bags in unincorporated areas

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By WIRE SERVICES  
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The county Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to ban single-use plastic bags at grocery stores, pharmacies and other shops in unincorporated Los Angeles County areas.

The ban is aimed at reducing by 50 percent the number of plastic bags that wind up in landfills, as well as in river beds and other areas.

Supervisors voted 3-1 in support of the ban, with Supervisor Mike Antonovich dissenting. County staff will now finalize exact wording of the ordinance, which will have to come back to the board for a final vote.

Under the ban, grocery stores and other retail outlets will be prohibited from using the bags. The ban will begin in some stores July 1 and be expanded to every store as defined in the ordinance on Jan. 1, 2012.

The ordinance will not apply to restaurant carry out or food trucks.

Stores will still be allowed to offer customers recyclable paper bags, but there will be a 10 cent charge per bag. Customers receiving food stamps would be entitled to a free reusable or paper bag under the ordinance.

According to the environmental group Heal the Bay, which supported the ban, the state spends \$25 million a year to collect and dispose of plastic bags. About 19 billion plastic bags are used in California each year, generating almost 150,000 tons of waste and killing marine animals and birds, according to the group.

“The environmental costs caused by these plastic bags are severe,” said county Public Works Director Gail Farber. “The cumulative effect is staggering.”

Heal the Bay and other advocates for the ban gathered outside the Hall of Administration before the board meeting amidst piles of hundreds of plastic bags to make their case.

“Something that we use for five minutes should not last for 500 years,” said actress

and activist Amy Smart, to cheers from the crowd.

“This is not just a coastline issue anymore,” said Raoul Diaz of nonprofit Homeboy Industries, saying the bags “caught against fences, stuck in the mud” are a blight on communities from South Los Angeles to Pacoima.

“They pollute every schoolyard, every residential neighborhood,” said Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who called the bags “urban tumbleweed.”

During a public hearing that followed the rally, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, thanked the supervisors for “standing up to an unprecedented hammering” by lobbyists from chemical companies opposed to the measure.

Brownley sponsored a bill to ban the bags statewide, but it was voted down in the Senate Aug. 31.

“If China, India, Ireland and even Bangladesh can ban plastic bags, certainly we can do so here in Los Angeles County,” Brownley said.

According to a report to the board prepared by Farber, the ban would slash the number of plastic bags used by each county household from the 2007 level of 1,600 to less than 800 by 2013. It would also save the county and local cities about \$4 million in litter-reduction costs, and reduce by 50 percent the number of bags sent to landfills.

“Our industry stands ready to implement this,” said Matthew Dodson of the California Grocers Association, adding that the group had worked with Brownley on the statewide bill.

Opponents of the measure argued that banning plastic bags will raise grocery costs for families, seniors and the unemployed, who are already struggling in a tough economy.

Others argued that the ban would cost jobs.

Adrian Backer, president of the California Film Extruders and Converters Association, said 2,300 jobs at plastic bag manufacturers statewide were at risk, and thousands more at suppliers. Los Angeles County is home to some of California’s leading plastic bag manufacturers, Backer said.

“If this ordinance becomes law, we have to ask how many small businesses will be hurt,” said George Kivett, chairman of the South Bay Association of Chambers of Commerce.

Sherri McCarthy of the American Chemistry Council told the board that some reusable bags include lead and other contaminants. Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas

asked that the language of the ordinance be amended to ensure that standards are set with regard to lead in reusable bags.

Antonovich said he was concerned about the economic consequences of the ban.

“At a time of economic uncertainty, with a large number of businesses already leaving our state,” he said. “It is not an appropriate time to impose this charge” on businesses and consumers.”

Some opponents threatened legal action and said the 10 cent charge could be interpreted as a tax under recently passed Proposition 26.

Malibu is the only city in Los Angeles County that has passed a ban against plastic bags that has survived legal challenges, according to Coby Sky of the Department of Public Works.

The board has been working to reduce the use of plastic bags through voluntary programs since at least 2008. In July, advocacy group Environment California presented the board with 1,800 signatures in support of an outright ban.

County officials also plan to urge the 88 cities within the county to adopt similar ordinances. Until then, they would not be subject to the ban. Los Angeles and Culver City are already moving toward bans.

“The wave is beginning here and hopefully it will be moving all the way up to Sacramento,” Supervisor Gloria Molina said.

Supervisor Don Knabe was absent for the vote.