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Plastic bag ban extends to smaller stores

Effective Sunday, retailers in county cannot offer plastic carry-out bags to customers

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Beginning Sunday, smaller grocery stores, pharmacies, convenience stores and food marts in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County are not allowed to distribute single-use plastic bags.

The same plastic-bag ban that went into effect in July at larger supermarkets in the county will now affect smaller places such as gas stations and 7-Eleven stores.

At least 644 "small stores" across the county will be affected. Nearly 30 of them are in the Santa Clarita Valley, most in Castaic.

Stores within the Santa Clarita city limits are not affected by the policy.

Representatives for some of the small stores said Friday they anticipate a reaction from their customers.

"Of course they're going to be upset," said Deena Samdin, assistant for the convenience store at the Mobil gas station on McBean Parkway and Decoro Drive.

"They get upset when we run out of coffee. They get upset when we run out of gas. Of course they're going to be upset when they don't get plastic bags," she said.

A customer at her gas station seemed less ruffled. "I just take a couple of Trader Joe's bags with me when I go to the store," she said.

"If they (county supervisors) want us to reuse bags, then I guess their plan is working," said the woman, who gave her name only as Holly.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted an ordinance banning single-use plastic carry-out bags at stores in the county's unincorporated areas, phasing it in using two steps.

Supermarkets have been allowed to offer paper bags for customers, but they charge 10 cents each. The 10-cent charge on paper bags is not subject to state sales tax.

County supervisors endorsed the ban as a way to help cut down on litter, protect

wildlife and marine habitats and improve water quality across the county.

John Spillani, manager of Beverages and More on The Old Road in Valencia, said he does not anticipate a problem with his customers since the store already offers its own reusable bags.

"Our recycle bags are 79 cents," he said as the store did a brisk business the day before New Year's Eve. "And our customers use them, so the (ban) is really not a big deal."

In an effort to ease the transition for bag-dependent consumers, the county spent a week before Christmas giving away free reusable shopping bags.

From Dec. 15 to Dec. 22, officials with the Los Angeles County Public Works' "Eco-Elf Patrol" went to local stores and libraries distributing free reusable shopping bags to customers until their supply ran out.

To make the transition more attractive, the county is running a plastic bag lottery of sorts, in which shoppers spotted using reusable bags have the opportunity to enter a sweepstakes for prizes.

According to the environmental Earth Resource Foundation, more than 100,000 marine creatures die every year from becoming entangled in plastic bags, many of them sea turtles.

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