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BYOB starting on Earth Day, April 22

By Shelly Reider | *Pacifica Tribune Guest Columnist*

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Plastic or paper? Neither! BYOB — Bring Your Own Bags to the stores. Starting on Earth Day on April 22, Pacifica, like most cities in the County, will launch the Reusable Bag Ordinance. This Ordinance, created and spearheaded by the County of San Mateo, prohibits stores from supplying single-use carryout plastic shopping bags and is intended to encourage shoppers to use reusable shopping bags. There are over 65 cities and counties throughout California that have single-use carryout bag ordinances. Why is the City of Pacifica, among other cities throughout California and the United States, doing this?

In California, there are approximately 19 billion plastic and 5 billion paper single-use bags used annually. In the Bay Area, there are nearly 4 billion plastic bags and 550 million paper bags used annually. Single-use carryout bags, the ones used for groceries, clothing and household items, are typically used one time and then discarded. Some of these bags may be reused and only a small percentage end up being recycled. Single-use carryout bags, especially plastic bags, often become litter which adversely affects the local and marine environment. Plastic bags are easily windblown and end up littering landscaping and streets where they travel down storm drain systems into the creeks and ultimately end up in the Ocean where they negatively affect the ecosystem.

In fact, each year about one million plastic bags end up in the S.F. Bay. This Ordinance will decrease the number of bags going to the landfill, reduce litter in our local waterways, and help the City save money on litter and storm drain cleanup.

According to the California Coastal Commission, up to 80 percent of all marine debris and 90 percent of floating debris is plastic, which never biodegrades. Wildlife mistake plastic bags for food and ingest them. Plastic marine debris entangles, suffocates, and kills species worldwide, including

sea turtles, birds, and marine mammals. The Reusable Bag Ordinance is essential for a coastal community like Pacifica where litter is an on-going problem.

What does the ordinance mean for retail stores and shoppers? The Ordinance prohibits retail stores from supplying single-use plastic and free paper carryout bags. This affects grocery stores and supermarkets, convenience stores, drug stores, clothing stores, and other retail stores that supply single-use carryout bags. The Ordinance does not apply to protective types of bags, including for meat, produce, bakery items and pharmaceuticals. Nonprofit charitable organizations are exempt from the regulations. Stores may supply paper bags, although the paper bags need to contain a minimum of 40 percent post-consumer recycled content and stores need to charge a minimum of 10 cents for each point-of-sale paper bag. The stores will retain the charge for the bags. If there was no charge placed on paper bags, customers would simply switch from using plastic bags to paper bags. The paper bag charge will not apply to those on special assistance such as the WIC or SNAP programs. The requirements to use recycled content and place a charge on paper bags are included to lessen the negative impacts to the environment for any potential increased use of paper bags and to help the stores recover the cost of the paper bags.

Keep bags handy, such as in the car or by the door, as a reminder to bring them shopping. For those needing reusable bags, the Pacifica Beach Coalition (PBC) has started an effort to gather unwanted reusable bags and distribute them to anyone who needs bags. You can drop-off your extra reusable shopping bags at the Community Center and the Parks, Beaches and Recreation office by April 18th, or at the PBC's Earth Day Festival. For those needing reusable bags, you can pick them up at the Earth Day Festival on April 20 at Linda Mar State Beach (south parking lot)

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from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Sanchez Art Center Tote Bag Decorating Booth. How cool is that?

To learn more about the Reusable Bag Ordinance, visit Pacifica's website at www.cityofpacific.org (<http://www.cityofpacific.org>) under "News and Events" or go to the County's website at www.smchealth.org/bagban (<http://www.smchealth.org/bagban>).

Bringing reusable bags to the stores will quickly become a healthy habit! So, shop in Pacifica and BYOB!

Shelly Reider is a resident of Pacifica and works for the City of Millbrae where a bag ordinance has successfully been in place since September of 2012, the first in the County. In the first week of the bag ordinance many shoppers were spotted bringing their bags and carrying the one to two items they bought instead of taking a paper bag.

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