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# Bagging the fruits of plastic ban

Shanghai Bund by CHOW HOW BAN

 [Shanghai Goes Green](#)

IN THE past, foreign-backed supermarkets in China gave away three plastic shopping bags for every 100 yuan worth of goods sold and 1.4 pieces in local supermarkets.

More than a year after a nationwide ban on the distribution of free plastic bags, people have made bringing reusable bags to supermarkets a part of shopping.

Now only 0.6 and 0.56 plastic bag per 100 yuan of sales are provided at foreign and local supermarkets.

Shanghainese Madam Zeng has adopted the new shopping behaviour though there have been concerns whether the elderly could adjust to it.

“Whenever I go to the supermarket, I would make sure I have my own plastic bags. If you throw them away, it will be a waste,” she said.

Another middle-aged resident said she planned her shopping trips well and would prepare some reusable bags before heading down to the supermarket.

“If I really wanted an extra plastic bag, I would buy it. But, usually I have my own bag, and it’s more environment-friendly.”

Another shopper said: “It’s a good way to reduce the use of plastic bags. I support it and have already gotten used to bringing my ownbags.”

Effective June 1 last year, the Chinese government put a stop to the trend of providing free plastic bags at all supermarkets, department stores, malls and other commercial outlets.

Operators must charge customers for plastic bags and the bags must be durable and be more than 0.025mm thick.

The government’s aim is to reduce the amount of non-degradable plastic bags, which eventually end up in landfills and rivers and harm lives.

Parkson China sold about 300,000 plastic bags at its department store on Central Huaihai Road in downtown Shanghai between last June and the end of last month.

“This was a substantial decrease from the number of plastic bags provided before the policy was implemented,” said Shanghai Nine Sea Parkson Plaza Co Ltd storemanager Danny Tan.

“You could see more people coming with their own plastic bags, paper bags or reusable bags. They have become more receptive to the policy.”

Tan said as there was no double standard for locals and foreigners. The store had to explain to some foreign tourists why they were

charged for the bags.

A spokesman of Lotus Supermarket said sales of plastic bags at its outlets around the city had declined about 80% since the ban was implemented.

“Plastic bags have been one of the most serious contributors to pollution, to which every country in the world is attaching growing importance,” she said.

According to Tan, Parkson China only made less than a sen from the sale of each plastic bag as its cost has become higher after the authorities set a higher standard on plastic bags.

“The new plastic bags are bio-degradable and must meet the new national standard. There are only certain manufacturers from whom we can get our supply,” he said.

“In fact, the government gave us about a year to prepare. All our new plastic bags arrived before June 1 last year and we simply changed our old bags to the new ones.”

The plastic bags are sold for 0.20 yuan (10 sen), 0.30 yuan and 0.40 yuan depending on the size.

From time to time, the department store also gives away environmentally friendly bags.

Tan said the authorities would conduct spot checks at department stores regularly and those who failed to meet the required standards on plastic bags would be fined.

Between March and last month the State Administration of Industry and Commerce collected over two million yuan (RM1.04mil) in fines from errant stores.

The General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine has launched various programmes to educate plastic manufacturers on environment conservation.

In Henan province, six companies were ordered to cease production of sub-standard plastic bags while 46 others were being investigated for violation of the new regulations.

From July 7, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region followed in the central government’s footsteps and implemented its own ban on plastic bags.

*Xinhua* agency quoted the China Chain Store and Franchise Associations as saying that the use of plastic bags in the retail industry had decreased by an average of 66% and the number of plastic bags had reduced to about 40 billion — from 50 billion in 2006 and 60 billion in 2007.

Supermarket operators do not see a drop in sales because of the policy.

Neither have they experienced any problem in selling plastic bags at a price lower than cost, its secretary-general Pei Liang said.

Despite the milestone progress, the authorities still face problems of enforcing the plastic bag ruling across all commercial places.

Wetmarkets, fruit stalls, bakeries and restaurants still provide plastic bags without charge.

Shoppers say that fish, poultry, vegetables, bread and other foodstuff must be put in plastic bags and it will be impossible for them to

pack such items in cloth bags.

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