

Nassau to require retailers to recycle bags

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March 23, 2008

Nassau County is finally trying to get a grip on those plastic shopping bags that end up adorning parking meters, trees, fences and other public structures.

Legislation to be introduced this week would require many supermarkets and retailers in Nassau to collect and recycle plastic bags, which are not biodegradable, and would encourage shoppers to switch to reusable sacks.

Suffolk County enacted a plastic bag recycling law in December, New York City followed in January, and many other municipalities have legislation in the works. The Nassau County Legislature is expected to consider the bill in committee on April 7 and vote on it later in the month.

Nassau Legis. David Denenberg (D-Merrick), one of the sponsors of the measure, said the final bill might require retailers to take responsibility for their advertising fliers, which also end up blowing onto neighboring properties.

"The fliers are a part of their business and they should be a good neighbor and be responsible for picking them up," Denenberg said.

He said the legislation also would include a provision requiring stores that try to circumvent the law by using paper bags to accept them for recycling.

A spokesman for Stop & Shop, which has 17 supermarkets in Nassau, said the chain already has recycling bins for plastic bags in all its Long Island stores. The spokesman, Robert Keane, said he had not heard about the proposal on fliers and paper bags and declined to comment on them.

A draft of the Nassau County bill says it would apply to stores with more than 5,000 square feet of retail or wholesale space, or which are part of a chain.

The affected stores would have to provide recyclable paper bags or offer reusable bags for sale, according to the draft. Stores that continued to use plastic bags would have to provide bins for used plastic bags and recycle the plastic it collects, the draft said.

The county Department of Consumer Affairs would be responsible for enforcement and could impose fines of up to \$300 per day for infractions, the draft said.

The county's environmental coordinator, Thomas Maher, said the administration of County Executive Thomas Suozzi had been working with the legislature on the bill, and was generally supportive.

The Suffolk County recycling bill has worked well, according to its sponsor, Legis. Wayne Horsley (D-Babylon).

"I see recycling bins at every store I pass. It's working well and I'm glad New York City, and now Nassau County, are following suit," Horsley said. "We got a call recently from Dutchess County, which is also interested."

Horsley said his review of legislation around the country shows it is basically the same, although localities vary on how large a store has to be before it has to recycle. Suffolk, and the Nassau proposal, require the recycling bin be "at" the store, while New York City requires the bins be "in" the stores, Horsley noted.

Out of the bag

- The annual consumption rate for plastic shopping bags worldwide is 500 billion.
- About 100 billion are used annually by Americans.
- Four of five grocery bags in the United States are plastic.
- Plastic bags are among the 12 most common items collected in coastal clean-ups.
- About 3.9 percent (1.4 million tons) of all plastics in 2003 were recycled.
- Ireland imposed a tax on plastic bags in 2002 and they have all but disappeared from use.
- Bangladesh bans them.

SOURCES: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION;
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