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Plastic bags sacked in Calabasas

Only paper and reusable will be allowed

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DIRTY BUSINESS— A Calabasas worker displays old plastic bags pulled from Las Virgenes Creek. The bags are an environmental hazard and increasingly cities and counties across California are taking a stand against them. File photo courtesy City of Calabasas

As of July, shoppers in Calabasas will no longer be offered plastic bags and those who don't bring their own reusable sacks will have to go without or buy paper bags at a cost of 10 cents each.

City officials voted unanimously last week to ban the use of disposable plastic bags at grocery stores and other retail shops.

The new law emulates Los Angeles County's plastic bag ordinance, which supervisors approved in November.

Large stores in Calabasas and unincorporated county areas have until July 1 to comply with the local law. The deadline for smaller stores is Jan. 1, 2012.

The ordinance doesn't forbid small plastic bags used for fruit, vegetables and raw meats.

"The Calabasas ordinance is a milestone in the city's effort to reduce litter, conserve natural resources and encourage a greener lifestyle," said Alex Farassati, environmental services manager for Calabasas.

In 2007, the city passed an ordinance to forbid retail food establishments, nonprofit food providers and city facilities from using food packaging materials made of plastic foam.

Calabasas leaders have been working with the business community for several years to discourage the use of plastic carryout bags in the city.

When the city surveyed 59 Calabasas businesses in 2008, it received a favorable response to the proposed ban, Farassati said. City representatives also met with local supermarkets and the California Grocers Association several times to discuss the new ordinance.

At first, officials hesitated to ban plastic bags, citing concerns about litigation and the possible economic impact that the ban might have on retailers. But when L.A. County passed its ordinance—backed by a 1,400-page environmental study that appeared immune from industry challenge—Calabasas leaders decided to go forward with their own law.

Although legislation for a statewide ban on plastic carryout bags failed last year, the law's sponsor, Assembly-member Julia Brownley (D-Woodland Hills), hasn't given up. She will try again this year.

Councilmember James Bozajian said a statewide ban would have been preferable to a patchwork quilt of municipal laws.

Mayor Barry Groveman said Calabasas will join cities such as Santa Monica to start a trend.

"Let's just be bold and go forward," he said before the vote.

Residents, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, Heal the Bay and Surfrider Foundation as well as other organizations wrote letters in support of the upcoming ban.

In coming weeks, the city will conduct a public education campaign to encourage shoppers to bring their reusable bags to the store and to inform residents that major supermarkets in Calabasas will no longer provide free bags after the ban goes into effect.