

Looming county bag ban pushes shoppers to reusable totes

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EAST SAN GABRIEL - Shoppers looking to protect the environment and avoid 10-cent fees on paper bags after July 1 lined up for free canvas bags at Howie's Ranch Market in East San Gabriel on Monday.

The local distribution, sponsored Los Angeles County Department of Public Works' environmental programs division, was the first - along with a bag giveaway in East Los Angeles on Monday - of about 24 such events the division will hold at various stores around the county through June 29.

Other bag giveaways will be held this month in East Pasadena, Hacienda Heights and Rowland Heights, among other locations. To find a participating store near you, visit molina.lacounty.gov.

Public works officials are giving away the bags in anticipation of the county's ban on single-use plastic grocery bags that goes into effect July 1.

The ordinance also requires customers to pay 10 cents for each paper bag they use at stores in unincorporated areas. The money will go to recycling education and to defray the stores' cost of providing reusable bags, officials said.

County Supervisor Gloria Molina, a proponent of the ban, said she hoped the giveaways would push people to join the effort against plastic bags.

"It's our way of encouraging everyone to do what's right for the environment," Molina said in a statement.

More than 100 customers scooped up the blue reusable bags Monday at Howie's, where most shoppers welcomed the new law and the push to use recyclable bags, according to Neonika Walker, program manager for public works' environmental programs division.

"It's about time," said shopper Jon Lujan, 64, of Pasadena.

Maki Hsieh, 37, of San Gabriel said the plastic bag ban was the county's way of keeping up with the most current efforts in the battle to preserve the environment.

"If you don't push people to carry reusable bags, you're kind of behind the times," she said.

She also liked the color chosen for the bags.

"I like the blue bags, they are kind of cool," she said.

The ban on plastic bags extends to all the unincorporated communities in the county. In addition to nixing plastic shopping bags, the ban calls for a 10-cent surcharge on paper bags, something Supervisor Michael Antonovich criticized when the ordinance was approved.

"At a time of economic uncertainty, with a large number of businesses leaving the state, this is the wrong time to impose additional draconian fees and regulations on businesses in unincorporated areas rather than adjacent areas," Antonovich spokesman Tony Bell said. "It is inherently unfair to impose a tax on one side of the street and not the

other."

The best way to curb pollution from plastic bags is to discourage littering, Bell added.

"The idea is to stop littering, not picking what people can litter with," he said.

As the county prepares to enforce its ban on plastic bags, cities from Los Angeles to Pasadena are crafting similar prohibitions. Los Angeles, Santa Monica and Pasadena are all considering similar bans, with Pasadena looking at an ordinance that mirrors the county's bag ban.

Pasadena would also establish a 10-cent fee, which would fund efforts to educate the public on recycling and offset the stores' cost of providing reusable bags, according to city documents.

The City Council could consider passing the ban as early as this month, according to city officials.

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