

SeaWorld cans plastic bags at theme park

By [Mike Lee \(/staff/mike-lee/\)](#) 9 a.m. April 22, 2011



[\(/photos/2010/nov/08/257244/\)](#) An artistic

rendering of the new SeaWorld attraction Turtle Reef, which will open June 18 and highlight sea turtles. — *SeaWorld*

SeaWorld will stop giving out plastic bags at its theme-park gift stores in San Diego on June 18 in hopes of cutting plastic pollution in the ocean.

Company officials said the move could save more than 1 million plastic bags from being used. They will offer customers paper and reusable sacks.

The shift away from plastic coincides with the opening of SeaWorld's Turtle Reef attraction, which emphasizes ecological aspects of the species. Plastic bags can be a major problem for some types of sea turtles, especially leatherbacks, that mistake them for jellyfish.

Turtle Reef will feature more than 60 threatened and endangered hawksbill and green sea turtles, including some that hatched at the marine-life park in 2009. One aquarium at the Turtle Reef gift shop will have floating bags and another will have jellyfish to provide a visual display of how similar they can look in the water.

"I think it's important that our guests can learn that they too can play a role in keeping trash and pollution out of the sea turtles' ocean environment," said Thad Dirksen, SeaWorld's curator of fishes.

Environmental groups have raised alarms in recent years about the effect of large amounts of floating plastics on the ocean environment.

Some stores have started charging for plastic bags to make customers think twice about using them. Efforts to get plastic carryout bags banned statewide have failed, but California does require supermarkets to offer plastic bag recycling.

In 2009, the latest year for statewide data, just 3 percent of the plastic carryout bags were recycled. That left more than 51,000 tons of them to collect in landfills, beaches and parking lots.

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