

Kerry Cavanaugh: In Malibu few people miss those plastic bags

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AS of next July, shoppers at grocery stores and pharmacies in unincorporated Los Angeles County need to bring their own bags or pay 10 cents for paper bags. Plastic bags have been banned by the Board of Supervisors.

To get a taste of life without plastic shopping bags I headed to Malibu, which has one of the few operating bag bans in the region. (Bag bans in Santa Monica and Manhattan Beach have been held up in court.)

The Malibu City Council passed its ban in 2008, and it was in full effect by June 2009. These days, the bag ban is so well established that nobody seems perturbed by the lack of plastic baggies.

I bought some oranges at Ralphs in the Malibu Colony Plaza shopping center (plastic produce bags were not banned) on Tuesday. The bagger paused, waiting to see if I produced my own reusable bag, and then asked if I needed a bag. My fruit went into a large brown bag - no handles.

Unlike the new county ordinance, which mandates a 10 cent fee for paper bags, Malibu shops don't have to charge for paper.

I noticed a few people walking around the shopping center, clutching the rolled top of their brown bags. Next door, the CVS drug store offered multiple sizes of paper bags, again no handles.

OK, those are the big chains that presumably have the money and know-how to transition to paper or reusable bags. But what about the small business person struggling to make it?

I stopped in to a temporary shop selling

clothes from local vendors to see how an independent entrepreneur was faring without plastic.

No problem, said Noreen Austin, who runs The Pop Up Shop in Malibu.

"People around here are getting hip to bringing reusable bags," Austin said. She offers customers paper bags or they can just carry their clothing purchases by hand.

That's just what folks were doing at the nearby Malibu Country Mart. It was lunchtime, and people managed to balance a couple of sandwiches and drinks in their arms. Picnic benches were full of people nibbling on salads and sandwiches with plastic utensils, napkins and little salt and pepper packets piled up next to them. No bags in sight, plastic or paper.

Emily Simon, general manager of Malibu Kitchen, said she'll offer leftover cardboard boxes to customers who need to carry out a lot of drinks

and food. They also offer paper bags.

"Most people will say, no thanks, save a tree," she said.

Occasionally a customer will ask for a plastic bag and she has to explain they're illegal in Malibu. The answer is usually, "Cool."

Now, Malibu is different. The median family income is \$140,000, compared to \$57,000 in Los Angeles County. So residents have the means to buy reusable bags and pay a little more if shops raise prices to pay for paper bags. Plus, Malibu has half a dozen grocery stores and a handful of drug stores, which typically favor plastic bags, so business education and enforcement is easier. No shop has been fined for offering plastic.

Still, the easy transition to plastic bagless-shopping in Malibu might ease concerns that the county ban will be a hardship on businesses and shoppers alike.

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