

South Tahoe may ban plastic bags



Canvas-nylon bags are growing in popularity.

By Kathryn Reed

Paper or plastic? One day that question may not be allowed to be asked in South Lake Tahoe.

The city's Sustainability Commission is developing a survey to send to business owners to find out how banning plastic bags in the city would impact them.

The board is leaning toward creating incentives for businesses to voluntarily stop using them instead of dictating policy. Incentives may include creating a consortium to buy more environmentally friendly bags for customers. To do so in bulk would cut the expense dramatically.

The commission intends to work with the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce through its green team.

Jeff Tillman of South Tahoe Refuse is a non-voting member on the local commission. He said at this month's meeting, "It's going to be up to the consumer and what type of habits they want to have. It's no different than the blue

bags we have now (for recycling).â€

The amount of petroleum used to create plastic bags is one of the major arguments for ridding the world of them. When they finally decompose after about 1,000 years, the bags leach contaminants into the soil.

Plastic bags that end up blowing along roadways and in the water pose a hazard to birds and marine life.

But they are cheap â€” about a penny to make. This compares to the nickel it costs to create a paper bag and the dime for compostable bags.

Many stores in Tahoe and elsewhere offer people the opportunity to buy canvas or nylon, reusable bags. South Tahoe with some partners developed such a bag that was a focal point of the 2008 annual Environmental Summit.

Simply switching to paper bags is not the best environmental decision because, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, creating paper compared to plastic bags causes 70 percent more air pollution and 50 times more water pollutants.

This is why reusable bags are all the rage.

Commissioners in November expect to approve the survey and have a plan for distributing it.