

South Tahoe initiates plan to cutback use of all bags

By Kathryn Reed



Reuse, reduce, recycle. That's the vocabulary the South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission wants the community to learn.

The idea is to prolong the life of what's considered a one-time bag from all stores, whether it's plastic or paper, by reusing it, not using it or recycling it. Keeping them out of the garbage and landfills is the ultimate goal.

Commissioners would like to eliminate their use completely, but legal issues prevent that from being the mantra, plus it offends some who may partner with the all-volunteer panel.

Much of Wednesday afternoon's discussion centered on defining the goal of the community education campaign. With input from South Tahoe High School students, South Tahoe Refuse and the American Chemistry Council, the final verbiage of the goal is, "Promote reduction, reuse and 100 percent recycling of one-time use bags to improve sustainable consumer behavior."

Vocalizing the message begins March 27 at Lake Tahoe Community College at Sierra Nevada Alliance's 5th annual Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival.

The idea is a slow, gradual roll-out of what the commission wants to do, with a possible major launch of the education campaign in June. Commissioners are thinking of having one month devoted to not using single-use bags.

Commissioners will spread the R words at the Earth Day celebration at the college on April 17 as well as at the Green Business mixer at Embassy Suites on April 22.

Plastic bags have dominated the commission's agenda in the 10 months that it has existed. This action plan is one of the more substantial things the seven members have accomplished. A full report of their activities and future goals will be presented to the City Council in May.

Bags present several concerns. One is the amount of petroleum products needed to create them, with paper being a bigger culprit than plastic. Plastic bags, though, tend to end up strewn about and create a different environmental headache.

Ryan Kenny with the American Chemistry Council said his group based in Sacramento wants to help South Lake, but believes the plastic bags as garbage is the biggest issue.

"Our membership will have a difficult time participating in a plan that eliminates our product," Kenny told the commissioners.

With that said, commissioners reworded their goal so the word "eliminate" was no longer part of the sentence.

Jeanne Lear of South Tahoe Refuse said her company is talking to Trex, which makes pseudo wood products out of recycled plastic at its Fernley plant.

Right now grocery stores have bins for people to recycle plastic bags that are then picked up by their respective companies. (STR will separate them out if people put them in the blue bags for recycling.) The refuse company may create a route where it would pick up the bags at the stores, then assemble them to be delivered to Trex.

Ashley Richardson, a senior at STHS, said students have talked about the idea of having bins to recycle plastic bags in

parking lots. People could load their goods in their vehicle and then dispose of the bag right away.

The way the commission is going to get the words “reuse, reduce, recycle” out are through advertising; social media and existing websites; signs at businesses that distribute bags; partnering with agencies and interested individuals; and having booths at events.

The end result the commission would like is for the public to change its behavior when it comes to one-time use bags – to essentially eliminate them from their lives. Instead of plastic or paper being the question, the idea is the consumer would come with their own bag.