

No plastic – no problem in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe residents are coping with less plastic – at least for now.

Grocery stores in the city had to stop providing single-use plastic bags to customers starting Jan. 15 per an ordinance that was approved last fall. Other stores and restaurants in town must comply with the ordinance beginning Oct. 15.

The city is one of more than 80 in the state that has banned the disposable bags. Los Angeles did the same earlier this month. It is estimated that more than 100 billion of these bags are used in the United States each year. Opponents to them cite environmental degradation even though it requires more energy to produce and deliver paper bags. *Time* magazine recently said, “One study found that a cotton tote must be used at least 131 times to be better for the planet than plastic.”

Grocery Outlet used to only have those single-use bags available. Not anymore. Now a thicker reusable plastic bag is available for 10 cents, paper for 5 cents or a thicker bag with the store’s name on it for 99 cents. About 1,000 of the logo bags have been given away by the store in the last few weeks.



Grocery Outlet provides a gentle reminder for those who left reusable bags in their vehicle. Photo/LTN

Mike Schouten, owner of the local Grocery Outlet, said about 75 percent of the people coming in were aware of the ban. He added that for the most part everyone was fine with not having the former plastic bags available.

Mariena Esposito had no bags when she left the store. As she was placing the individual items from her cart into her vehicle she admitted she forgets to bring her reusable bags with her.

Esposito is hearing older people who are more set in their ways are upset with the ban. One man leaving the store pointed to his Grocery Outlet bag in his cart and said, "It's ridiculous man. You have to pay for that, too."

At Safeway, Mark McCarthy opted for the free paper bag. But that's not his first choice.

"I need the plastic bags for recycling. I guess I'll have to get Glad Hefty bags," McCarthy said.

"There are dozens of cities and counties with various versions of a bag ban. We see these as very positive. We are certainly concerned about protecting our environment and reducing the number of single-use bags in the waste stream," Keith Turner, director of public and governmental affairs for Safeway, told

Lake Tahoe News. "We anticipate that the change will go smoothly, as employees are versed on the new rules."

Safeway has logo bags for sale for \$1.49. Those with a store discount card can get one free until Jan. 31 for every \$25 that is spent. There is a three-bag limit on freebies.

Cindy Littell had her goods in one of those bags. It will add to the collection of more than a half dozen she has at home. She's glad the town has caught up with other areas that ban bags.

"It's a good thing. (Bags) will still be there (decomposing) when I'm long dead and gone," Jeff Garvin said as he was leaving Raley's at the Y.

Raley's was giving out logo bags to the first 500 customers on Wednesday. Otherwise they are 99 cents. A little more heavy-duty ones sell for \$1.99. Paper bags are 5 cents.

Lead clerk April Kirkhuff told *Lake Tahoe News* about 35 percent of customers already use reusable bags.

Asked if she thought it would be more of a problem with tourists who may not have read about the ban, especially with this being a three-day weekend, she said, "I think tourists will pay the 5 cents and not really think twice about it. If they have enough money to go on vacation in Tahoe, 5 cents isn't anything."

While the stores are complying with the law, the city is not putting any effort into enforcing it.

"The city has no staff assigned for code enforcement on this issue," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The council gave clear direction they were not interested in taking coercive methods with compliance. They wanted a friendly approach."