

# The Carmel Pine Cone

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## Carmel's got a bag ban and lessons learned from Monterey

By THE MONTEREY REGIONAL WASTE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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THIS MONTH, Carmel shoppers may have noticed the absence of the plastic shopping bag in accordance with a new city ordinance. While some are inspired, and others irritated, results from nearby bag-less communities show a drastic reduction in plastic litter and a spike in reusable bag toting.

The Carmel plastic bag ban for retail stores took effect Feb. 3. Exceptions to the ban are bags used to transport bulk foods to the point of sale, prescription medications, and bags used to segregate food. Exempt businesses are restaurants in which food prepared on premises accounts for 90 percent of sales, as well as nonprofits receiving more than 50 percent of sales from donated goods or materials for reuse. For businesses not in compliance, the city can issue warnings or fines.

Unlike the bag ban in the City of Monterey, Carmel isn't requiring merchants to charge for paper bags. The Monterey Peninsula Chamber of Commerce unsurprisingly finds most people like the idea of protecting the environment through decreased plastic use; however, many grumble about the now 25 cent-per-paper-bag charge in Monterey, despite its effectiveness in encouraging reusable bags.

"Cities have different bag standards," said Jody Hansen, CEO and president of the chamber of commerce, adding that "some businesses also get confused while trying to account for the fee, and others assume it goes back to the government." In Monterey, the bag revenue stays with the retailer to cover the cost of paper bags, as state law prohibits local jurisdictions from collecting bag fees either directly or indirectly.

According to Monta Potter, CEO of the Carmel Chamber, it is too early to get an overall response from the business community on the effects of and reaction to the bag ban. Patrick Schrady of, Nielsen Bros. Market in downtown Carmel noted that his customers have been very receptive to the plastic bag ban and that reusable bag use and sales have been up despite the lack of a paper-bag fee.

Yet what some see as a sacrifice has already been paying off for the environment. The nonprofit Save Our Shores, which conducts more than 200 beach cleanups per year, has seen a 45 percent decrease in plastic bag litter in Monterey, and a 58 percent decrease in Santa Cruz some nine months after its bag ban. In Santa Cruz, Save Our Shores tabulated 10 percent of customers carrying reusable bags before the bag ban, while 80 percent brought reusable bags or took no bag at all just 30 days after the ban took effect.

In the wake of the Carmel ban, this is a trend we hope to see on the south side of the Monterey Peninsula as well.

If you have any questions about the Carmel policy, please call Sharon Friedrichsen at city hall (831) 620-2021.