

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS YVONNE B. BURKE AND
ZEV YAROSLAVSKY**

APRIL 10, 2007

In January, the Board of Supervisors approved a Countywide Energy and Environmental Policy that includes the Environmental Stewardship Program. The primary goal of this program is to “walk lightly on the earth” and minimize the County’s environmental footprint by developing policies and adopting innovations designed to reduce the negative environmental impacts of County operations.

In our community, the prevalence of plastic grocery bags, especially ones made of petroleum-based polyethylene, have a long track record of environmental degradation. Their manufacture consumes enormous amounts of crude oil and natural gas, both non-renewable resources, and the resulting products, once discarded, clutter landfills, litter our streets, schools, and parks, and join a solid-waste stream that pollutes our coastal and inland waterways and endangers fish and wildlife.

According to EPA, the U.S. consumes about 380 billion plastic bags, sacks and wraps a year. However, while recycling programs readily accept paper products, the current recycling rate of plastic bags is very low. For example, research has shown that 20 percent of paper bags are recycled, while the estimated rate of recycling for plastic

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bags is as low as 1 percent. Even when recycled, such plastics can take 1,000 years to decompose. According to the EPA, even paper does not break down at a substantially faster rate than plastic in dark, dry, anaerobic sanitary landfill conditions. Moreover, paper sacks consume far more energy to produce, and take up far more landfill space.

While the EPA found that neither paper nor plastic is clearly superior from a green perspective, there are alternatives to the current paper vs. plastic dilemma. Sacks made from recycled paper, or more biodegradable, compostable plastic, would each leave a significantly smaller environmental footprint. Encouraging consumers to buy reusable sacks, or reuse several times the plastic or paper sacks they currently use only once, would respect and protect the environment even more.

San Francisco recently became the first municipality in the nation to join a global trend to ban the use of non-recyclable plastic bags in grocery chains and retail stores. The County of Los Angeles should take the next step and examine an even broader range of options to reduce the grocery sack solid-waste stream in our community.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with the Internal Services Department, the Department of Public Works, and solicit input from outside environmental protection organizations, to:

- 1) Investigate the issue of polyethylene plastic and paper sack consumption in Los Angeles County, including the pros and cons of adopting a policy similar to that of San Francisco;

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- 2) Inventory and assess the impact of the current campaigns that urge recycling of paper and plastic sacks within the County of Los Angeles; and
- 3) Report back to the Board of Supervisors with findings and recommendations to reduce grocery sack waste within 90 days.

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(YBB:KK:ec Bag Ban mot 041007)