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## Environmentalists say recycling in the bag

**HN** By KAREN KELLER, HERALD NEWS | 09/09/07 02:11 AM

Conservation effort targeting plastics  
**CLIFTON** -- San Francisco banned plastic bags in supermarkets. Now Clifton, with a line of free reusable shopping bags, is joining a growing movement of American towns to ditch plastic.

According to environmental experts, the city's move is in synch with a national resolve to reduce waste and conserve energy. Local governments are starting to address environmental issues more aggressively, while plastics-reduction mania is gripping the nation. Area supermarkets are already encouraging the use of reusable shopping bags, and one ShopRite supermarket in Little Falls has started a program to curb plastic water-bottle use.

Recycling director Al DuBois plans to distribute cloth bags -- paid for through state recycling grants -- at city events such as street fairs, he said Friday. The idea is to discourage use of plastic shopping bags. The city also will be distributing travel cups and ceramic mugs to cut down on water bottles and disposable coffee cups, he said.

He means business.

Residents are asked to sign a pledge to receive one of the items: "I pledge to use this reusable bag and refillable mug to preserve the environment and be a sustainable citizen."

The next time residents can angle for a free tote or mug will be Sept. 16 at the Van Houten Street Fair. DuBois said he's ordered 500 of each. The city spent about \$700 to buy the items, using state grant money tied to a municipality's recycling tonnage, he said.

Municipalities are addressing issues such as global warming to fill the void of federal action, said Jeff Tittel, executive director of the Sierra Club's New Jersey chapter. The government is lagging and out of step in improving the environment, he said.

"It's sort of this grass-roots movement where the towns are trying to do what's right for the environment because what the federal government is doing is wrong," he said. Tittel cited the federal government's past refusal to acknowledge global warming as a threat while endorsing offshore oil drilling.

The latest environmental trend is efforts to cut down on plastic bags, said Bill Wolfe,



Albert DuBois, Clifton's recycling coordinator, left, and city manager Albert Greco display reusable bags and coffee mugs to be given away at the upcoming Van Houten Street Fair. (Amy Newman/Herald News)

he said. But the next step to reduce landfills and save energy is to force manufacturers to use less packaging in the first place, he said.

"Right now, we're starting to see that sea change taking off in terms of plastic bags," he said. "But there are limits to what the individual consumer can do."

In March, the San Francisco City Council passed a ban on plastic checkout bags at supermarkets and chain pharmacies.

Representatives for A&P, Pathmark and Stop & Shop said their companies started selling reusable shopping totes either this year or last fall, at 99 cents apiece. A&P has sold 780,000 totes, said Patti Councill, A&P corporate communications manager, while Pathmark has sold more than 100,000, said Rich Savner, public affairs director.

Pathmark, ShopRite and A&P also offer a 1- or 2-cent rebate to customers who bring in their own shopping bags.

ShopRite has been offering reusable totes for "almost a year," said Rich Greco, store manager of ShopRite in Little Falls. Shoprite has also been recycling used plastic shopping bags brought in by customers for "almost 10 years," Greco said. The other three supermarkets are looking to recycle bags, representatives said.

Two weeks ago, ShopRite's Little Falls store unveiled a partnership with bottled water company Glacier Water, whereby customers pay 99 cents for an initial plastic gallon of water. When they return with the same gallon jug, customers pay 39 cents to refill the jug with water purified on site by Glacier Water filters, Greco said.

DuBois visited the store recently and was overjoyed, he said.

"It's exciting," he said. "That ShopRite thing is powerful ... the next step would be bleach and detergents," he said. "If we can reduce the packaging ... through refillables, we can win the war."

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