

Tucson Requires Plastic Bag Recycling

On Sept. 24, 2009, an ordinance will go into effect in the city of Tucson requiring plastic bag recycling by retail establishments operating more than 10,000 square feet of retail space at two or more locations. Restaurants are exempt.

Here is how the ordinance will work: a customer will take clean plastic dry cleaners bags, sandwich bags, and retail plastic bags (other than those that are colored black or red) to a store where there will be a collection receptacle for them. Trucks belonging to the retail stores take the bags to warehouses in Phoenix where they are then collected and sent to manufacturing plants making sturdy plastic playground equipment and outdoor decks. There is a growing demand for plastic film, according to Andrew Quigley, director of Tucson Environmental Services.

The City of Tucson worked closely with the Phoenix-based Arizona Food Marketing Alliance (AFMA) to develop the new ordinance. Tim McCabe, president of AFMA, says Flagstaff, Maricopa County and Kingman have all adopted similar ordinances. The program has won an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regional award. Other states have inquired about the program.

McCabe says consumers want to do the right thing and they will recycle if it is easy and they know what to do. Educating customers will signal the success of this program. Stores will have reduce, reuse, and recycle messages on the plastic bag itself so folks are aware of the program. Retailers will also have information available on the environmental benefits of recycling plastic bags: greenhouse gas reduction, energy savings, and litter reduction. City efforts to educate consumers about the ordinance will begin later this summer.