



Plastic Bag Monsters

Shannon Switzer

EVENT CALENDAR
December 2008

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	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
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Kicking Plastic and Paper to the Curb
Santa Barbara Enviro Protest Plastic with "Day Without a Bag"

Friday, December 19, 2008
by SHANNON SWITZER

Two bag monsters protesting their impending demise drew people's attention this afternoon at the "Day Without a Bag" event held outside Santa Barbara City Hall as similar demonstrations occurred statewide. The Bag Monsters — in reality two volunteers hoping to convince people to stop using plastic bags — were covered from head-to-toe with 500 plastic grocery bags to represent how many the average American uses per year.

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Shannon Switzer
Hillary Hauser and Jean-Michel Cousteau

While the bag monsters protested, **Jean-Michel Cousteau**, the son of legendary sea explorer **Jacques Cousteau** and founder and president of the Santa Barbara-based **Ocean Futures Society**, spoke with members of the community about the importance of educating the public to use nondisposable bags when shopping.

"We need to reach out, especially to kids and schools—to kids who don't already have the bad habits we do," Cousteau answered in response to the question of whether he thinks people will actually voluntarily change their paper-or-plastic mentality without enacting legislation against disposable bag use. He added, "It can't be done overnight, but education is the key. I'm still learning every day myself."



Shannon Switzer
Jean-Michel Cousteau educating a youngster about the harms of plastic shopping bags to the environment.

Kira Redmond, director of **Santa Barbara Channelkeeper**, was also present at the event. She agreed with Cousteau that education is important but also stressed the need for creating a city ordinance either banning plastic bags outright and mandating shops levy a fee on paper bags, or creating fees on both plastic and paper. "Education is important, but in other cities that alone

hasn't worked," she said. However, Redmond also acknowledged that in addition to requesting the city pass legislation by summer 2009, Channelkeeper also wants "the public to embrace the idea before it is enacted into law." Something, she said, they hope to accomplish by implementing programs to educate retailers and the general public about the benefits of using renewable bags.

Stephen Macintosh, the Environmental Services Supervisor for the Santa Barbara City Council, seemed hopeful about the pending ordinance and explained his role in the process. "I am working with Channelkeeper from the city's standpoint to help people get away from single-use bags," he said. He also pointed out that eliminating disposables from retail and grocery stores has been successful in other countries and that the majority of the money earned by charging for bags would go back to the stores themselves.



Shannon Switzer
Plastic Bag Monster

So far more than 20 Santa Barbara businesses and organizations have signed onto the re-usable bag movement, including retailers like Home Depot and Ralphs as well as nonprofits such as Heal the Ocean. Despite this support, actually getting the law enacted might not be as simple as proponents hope. In other cities such as Oakland, where legislation has already passed against plastic bags, the representatives of the plastic industry have sued. According to Redmond, the plastics people ironically argued in their suit that no Environmental Impact

Report was done on the possible negative effects that diverting people to using only paper bags would cause if plastic is outlawed.

Nevertheless, after debuting at City Hall at noon, the "Day Without a Bag" campaign made an appearance at various locations around town, passing out free reusable bags donated by **ChicoBag**, which also masterminded the bag monster concept that holds demonstrations statewide, as well as by Trader Joe's. Information about environmental impacts of disposables was also distributed to those interested in learning more.

To learn more, go to the [Day Without a Bag official Web site](#).

Shannon Switzer is an Independent intern.

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