By Amy Sylvestri

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This year in Alameda County, it's BYOB – bring your own bag.

The county's "Reusable Bag Ordinance" went into effect on Jan. 1, so say goodbye to plastic bags at most stores.

Plastic bags are now banned as of the first of the year at stores in San Leandro and all over the county. You will either have to bring your own reusable bags or pay 10 cents each for paper bags.

The ban affects any store that sells packaged foods – anything from grocery stores, to Target, to mom and pop corner shops. You can still use plastic bags for produce, meat, and bulk items.

San Francisco, San Jose, and over 50 other cities and counties in California already have similar bans.

"Plastic bags harm marine life, are difficult to recycle, and are one of the most common litter items found in our creeks, storm drains, and streets," said Gary Wolffe, executive director of StopWaste.org (the county's recycling program) in a written statement.

“By limiting the distribution of single-use bags and urging people to bring reusable bags, we expect to see far fewer plastic bags littering our cities in the future,” Wolffe said. “One reusable bag can replace as many as 600 single-use bags over its lifetime.”

But some people disagree with the ban, saying they reuse plastic bags as well and they are practical, so they shouldn’t be banned.

“I use them all the time, I line my little trash cans with them and sometimes take my lunch in them,” said Monet Allen, who was heading into the Safeway store on Bancroft Wednesday morning.

Also at the Safeway, shopper Rickey Williams had forgotten about the ban when he went to get his groceries and had to pay for paper bags, but said it wasn’t too much of an inconvenience.

“It won’t change the way I shop or how much, you’ve got to get what you’ve got to get,” said Williams. “But next time, I’m going to remember to bring my own bags.”

CAPTION: Rickey WIlliams forgot to bring his own bags to the grocery store Wednesday and had to pay for paper bags, one of which ripped as soon as he picked it up.

PHOTO BY AMY SYLVESTRI