

# Bagging the bag

Large retailers gear up to abide by looming ban on plastic grocery bags

By Steve Clark,  
The Brownsville Herald

Plastic bags don't grow on trees, though plenty of them seem to wind up there anyway - in trees, shrubs, resacas, along fence lines, snagged on car antennas, etc.

A plastic bag ordinance, approved by city commissioners in December, is meant to address the problem, though some business leaders are concerned about the impact on themselves and their customers once the bag is sent packing. The ordinance established a voluntary, citywide ban on plastic shopping bags at the point of sale. The voluntary ban began Jan. 1, 2010. The mandatory ban kicks in Jan. 1, 2011.

On March 1 the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce held a session for business people to air questions and concerns regarding the ban. Among the attendees were representatives from A.V. Lopez, H-E-B, Dillard's, Stripes, Sunrise Mall and Walmart. Art Rodriguez, director of the city's public health department, did most of the talking, stating that the ordinance was in response to the fact that plastic bags are "trashing the city." The ordinance falls under the health department's jurisdiction.

"What the ordinance really calls for is a cultural change - a change in the way we're doing business," Rodriguez says.

He concedes that plastic bag bans had failed elsewhere in Texas - Laredo, for instance. That city's attempt to ban the bag burst in the face of opposition from Laredo's downtown merchants association, Rodriguez says.



On Monday, March 1, 2010 the Brownsville Chamber of Commerce organized an informational session for business people to ask questions and air concerns regarding the plastic bag ordinance.

Not so in Austin, which adopted a voluntary bag ban that has enjoyed a very high rate of compliance - and all it took was a resolution. Brownsville isn't Austin, though H-E-Bs and Walmarts here already have started offering reusable grocery bags for sale. H-E-B says it's encouraging customers to stock up on reusable bags and get accustomed to bringing them to the store. Unless something changes, beginning Jan. 1, 2011, H-E-B customers expecting bags for their groceries will get a surprise instead.

"This is an ordinance that's promoting the use of reusable bags," says Robert Palomine, H-E-B's director of retail operations. "Come that time our customers need to be aware that there's not going to be a plastic bag or a paper bag available to them. The intent here is to get them to use reusable bags."

He observes that the city commission - whose members voted unanimously in favor of the ban - is "really committed to the ordinance." Palomine says H-E-B is doing its best to make sure it and its customers are prepared.

Phase one of the ban will be an advertising campaign to

educate residents. Phase two will involve gauging how well the ban is working. The city probably will ask UTB-TSC to handle the monitoring aspect, Rodriguez says, noting that Brownsville residents are already adapting to the reusables despite no marketing so far. A dry run for the mandatory ban will take place on Earth Day, April 22.

The ordinance does contain exemptions. For example, it will still be OK to use plastic for meat, fish and other perishables. Further exemptions are possible as the ordinance's advisory committee gathers input from the business community, Rodriguez says. At some point the committee will offer recommendations to the city commission on how or whether the ban should be tweaked, the voluntary period extended and so on. The city of South Padre Island is also in the process of crafting a bag ban, says SPI health director Victor Baldovinos, who attended the March 1 session.

Angela Burton, president and CEO of the Brownsville chamber, sits on the advisory board along with six other business leaders. She points

*continued on page 5 (Bagging the Bag)*

# Go Green with Natural Limestone

by Roberto Garza,  
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As everyone is thinking "green", natural limestone should be at the top of the list. There are thermal engineering calculations that actually point out the benefits of using natural limestone on the exterior walls of a structure. With this in mind, we need to pay attention to the efficiency of this natural product. This includes the thermal protection, sound prevention, and longevity, as it relates to the structure. So, rather than bore you to death with a calculus lesson and the importance of these factors, we will try to keep it simple.

Natural limestone has a thermal factor that retards the heating up and cooling down process. This means that structures would have little need for a large HVAC system. To elaborate, if you left your a/c off all day from 8am to 8pm, your interior temperature would be at its hottest around 6pm due to the heating up of the materials. Since limestone's temperature changes slowly, your building would not heat up as fast in the summer, and conversely would cool down slower in winter. Not to mention that the light color of the stone would reflect the sunlight. Of course you also have to take into consideration the other building materials used, such as windows and roofing, but a structure built entirely of limestone would use less energy and help the environment.

Also, we would like to point out the sound factor. You know when the neighborhood kids pass by with their "BOOM BOOM" full volume, shaking your walls? The sheer mass of natural limestone, and the

fact that there are no holes like with brick or block, greatly reduces this sound and vibration. Natural limestone would create a natural sound barrier that would protect against the "noise pollution."

As far as the longevity of natural limestone, well...it's been on this planet for millions of years, so another 50-100 years shouldn't make any difference. History has shown that the longest lasting structures were made from natural limestone. The great pyramids in Egypt and Mayan temples, to name

a couple of examples. Also, a more local structure would be the San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio, Texas, built 1738-1750, and made from our local Texas Limestone. With proper installation of natural limestone, your structure should outlive the rest. After that, the limestone could always be recycled, re-cut, or crushed - to be reused over and over again.

Thermal Protection, sound suppression, and longevity...natural limestone...Go Green!

**Reduce, Reuse, Rethink and Recycle**

**Use Reusable Bags and Turn BROWNSVILLE GREEN!**

**Look for Our Big Earth Day Event Coming to a Mall, Store or School Near You**

**EARTH DAY APRIL 22**

Healthy Communities of Brownsville  
www.healthbrownsville.org

Bags R<sup>5</sup>  
Recycle. Reduce. Reuse.