

## CoolCalifornia.org

Simple steps for a sustainable future

#### **Ukiah High School BYOB: Bring Your Own Bag**

Members of the Ukiah High School Environmental Club created the Bring Your Own Bag campaign to boost community awareness and involvement in reducing plastic bag use.

The BYOBag's goal was to raise awareness about the need for reusable bags and to connect with residents in favor of passing an ordinance banning single use plastic bags. The ordinance would also place a fee on one time use paper bags.

Overall, 22 businesses participated in the raffle giving customers tickets each time they used a reusable bag. Twenty-seven prizes were also donated by local businesses. The event was highly publicized by the students through a front page article in the Ukiah newspaper, radio ads, an appearance on a local television station, and posters hung around town and the high school.

Ukiah City Council members Mary Anne Landis and Benj Thomas helped create an ordinance banning single use plastic bags in Ukiah. Modeled after Mendocino County's ban, the students and council members created a website, bagfreeukiah.com, to promote the cause. The group presented their proposal to two Rotary clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Ukiah Main Street Program to enlist support.

An ordinance was officially passed in April 2011, prohibiting single use plastic bags and imposing a 10¢ charge for paper bags. To be considered reusable, a bag must be able to carry 22 pounds, for at least 125 trips of over 175 feet.

#### **Project Highlights**

#### **Bag-Free Ukiah:**

- Initiated by the Ukiah High School Environmental Club whose motto is "No one can do everything but everyone can do something"
- Eliminated plastic bags; 10¢ fee placed on paper
- Modeled after anordinance in Mendocino

#### **County Community Support:**

- Customers who shopped at 22 Ukiah stores using a reusable shopping bag received a raffle ticket for the BYOBag raffle.
- Prizes were donated by 27 businesses as well as the use of Ukiah Brewing Co. and Restaurant for the drawing and celebration.

#### Disposable Bag Facts:

- The Empire State Building could be filled two-and-ahalf times with the waste created by disposable bags
- Annually, the United States consumes 10 million paper bags, destroying 14 million trees
- Only 10-15 percent of bags are recycled, 10 percent end up in the ocean, and of that 70 percent land on the ocean floor where the bags cannot decompose
- Grocery stores charge 5¢ to 23¢ per bag, which is added into food costs



Members of the Environmental Club at Ukiah High School organized the Bring Your Own Bag raffle to encourage the community to embrace reusable bags and pass an ordinance to prohibit plastic bags throughout the district.

# CLIMATE CENERATION PROGRAM

#### Why can't plastic bags just be recycled?

Plastic bags do not biodegrade, they break into smaller pieces but never truly disappear causing the ocean to be filled with small pieces of plastic which can harm oceanic plants and animals and potentially infect food supplies. Furthermore, every year 16 billion plastic bags enter the California Waste Stream costing taxpayers 17¢ each to dispose of, making it more practical to ban the bags altogether.

#### Are plastic bags really worse than paper?

Not necessarily. Paper takes four times as much energy to produce as plastic, creates 70 percent more air pollution, and fifty times more water pollution. However, plastic produces four times as much waste as paper. Every year, it requires 14 million trees to produce 10 million paper bags and 12 million barrels of oil to produce single use plastic bags in the United States alone. Plastic also takes over a thousand years to break down while paper takes merely months. Neither option is excellent, reusable bags are the best option.

### How can a Bring Your Own Bag campaign be started in other towns?

Start with organizing a community wide event to generate excitement for the idea. For a raffle, discuss the proposal with local businesses and provide guidelines for handing out the tickets. Ask about contributing prizes or a venue for the celebration along with the donation of entertainment options. Gain support from community and business leaders, making endorsement for the ordinance clear when talking to city council members. When drafting the proposal, address city council and public concerns; consider holding a public forum to explain why a bag ban would not only benefit the environment, but the community too.



Posters advertising the Ukiah Bring Your Own Bag raffle and campaign were placed around the city and Ukiah High School along with advertisements on a local TV station, radio broadcast, and a front page article in the Ukiah newspaper.



Students from Ukiah High School dressed up as the "Bag Monster" while collecting signatures in favor of an ordinance that would ban single use plastic bags. The costume represents how many bags the average shopper uses in one year.

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