

# City ponders plastic bag ban

*Council members aim to find solution to pollution issue*

**By Lindsey Mullikin**

The Austin City Council will consider a resolution on Thursday to limit or ban the use of plastic bags made from petroleum products in Austin stores.

"We don't know what we want to do or how we are going to do it, but we know we want to reduce the number of plastic bags in our landfill," said Councilman Lee Leffingwell, who sponsored the resolution with Councilman Mike Martinez and Mayor Will Wynn.

If passed, the council will have 90 days to explore potential solutions to the pollution created by the plastic bags, he said.

San Francisco's city council passed an ordinance banning the use of plastic bags in March. The city, which has a population of approximately 752,000, estimates that it generates 1,400 tons of plastic bag waste each year. Austin, with a similar population of approximately 660,000, probably generates more than 1,000 tons, Leffingwell said.

"I don't anticipate that there will be a ban on plastic bags," he said. "The ideal solution would be re-use."

Leffingwell said the use of non-petroleum plastic bags could be an option, however, those bags are more expensive. Local grocery companies have been cooperative in discussing their use of plastic bags, but there may not be much Austin can do about the problem, he said.

"I expect [the resolution] will be well-received," he said. "It is just a recognition of a problem."

The improper disposal of the bags is problematic to the environment, said Corinna Kester, staff adviser for the UT Environmental Center.

"Animals don't know not to eat them. They think that they are food," she said.

One of the best ways to reduce use of this resource is to deter customers from using plastic bags by charging them extra, said Kester, who said she keeps cloth bags in the trunk of her car for impromptu grocery shopping trips. Even when plastic bags are her only option, Kester said she later reuses them for trash bags in her house.

"I think when you try to protect the environment, you have to be realistic. Immediately when I hear about it, I think the idea of banning plastic bags is logistically impossible," she said.

Plastic bags are used in the Kin's and Jester City markets on the University's campus.

Scott Meyer, associate director of the Division of Housing and Food Service, said he is unsure of the changes the resolution would have on the campus facilities.

"Obviously, we are going to do what is best for the University of Texas and the Earth," he said.

Seth Whaland, assistant service manager at HEB's Central Market, said he believes the company will continue to offer both paper and plastic bags to customers in the future.

Whaland said he personally chooses to use paper bags, because they do not fund oil companies and are more easily recycled.

"And they just hold more," he said.

<http://media.www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2007/04/18/StateLocal/City-Ponders.Plastic.Bag.Ban-2848879.shtml>

**Austin** is the capital of the U.S. state of Texas and the county seat of Travis County.