

Tiny Canadian town enacts ban on plastic bags

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By Patricia Launt

TORONTO (Reuters) - A small Canadian town claimed the honor on Monday of being the first municipality in North America to ban retailers from using plastic bags, in an effort to maintain its pristine environment.

The town's administrator said Leaf Rapids, a northern Manitoba mining town about 975 km (610 miles) northwest of Winnipeg, has ordered retailers to stop giving away or selling single-use plastic bags as of Monday. Stores that break the law face a C\$1,000 (\$865) fine.

The move is the latest step Leaf Rapids has taken to combat the bags which have littered its streets and landfill. It became law ahead of a similar ban voted on last week by San Francisco, which has not yet come into effect.

"Leaf Rapids has always been an environmental community," Administrator Bond Ryan said. "It's a relatively new community, built in the 1970s, and it was built with the environment in mind."

Last year, it placed a levy of 3 Canadian cents on each plastic bag local merchants gave away, which cut the approximately 50,000 bags residents used in half, according to Ryan.

Leaf Rapids decided to go one step further last fall and ban the bags outright after an Ontario company, which makes reusable shopping bags, approached the town about introducing a total ban on single-use plastic bags. The company offered to set up education programs in local schools and help promote the program.

Leaf Rapids has since given away about 3,000 of the reusable polypropylene bags to the town's 600 residents, who Ryan says have been supportive of the ban.

"People will go ahead on their own anyway, once the municipality says they'll do things to reduce shopping bag use," he said.

Leaf Rapids, a planned community that was established to support a copper and zinc mine, is not the first to crack down on plastic bags. Ireland introduced a tax on them in 2002 which reduced their use by 90 percent. Meanwhile, some communities in Australia have banned them in retail stores since 2003.