



City of Long Beach
Working Together to Serve

Office of Gerrie Schipske, R.N.P., J.D.
Councilwoman, Fifth District
Memorandum

R-12

Date: March 12, 2013

To: Honorable Mayor and City Council

From: Councilwoman Gerrie Schipske, Fifth District

Subject: Request City Manager to Work with Public Health Officer to Require Stores to Provide Information Concerning the Risks of Not Cleaning and Disinfecting Reusable Bags Used to Carry Groceries

Discussion:

The City enacted an ordinance banning plastic bags at stores as a way of encouraging the use of reusable bags. Recent studies indicate that the reusable bags may be the source of E.Coli and other bacteria, which cause serious illness and infection, if the bags are not washed and disinfected between uses. Additionally, after carrying meat, poultry and other items, customers apparently are often returning their bags to the trunks of their cars where increased temperatures can speed the growth of bacteria from these fluids. Some customers use their bags to also carry clothing and shoes.

The City's ordinance fails to require that reusable bags be capable of being cleaned and disinfected and machine washable.

As with any public health matter, it is critical that we inform, educate and empower residents about health issues in our community. It is important that our Public Health Department provide information through the stores about the need for proper cleaning and disinfecting of reusable bags in between uses. The Loma Linda University School of Public Health (after finding 12% of the reusable bags they sampled at grocery stores positive for Escherichia coli) recommended that the "public needs to be educated about the proper care of reusable bags by printed instructions on the bags or through public service announcements." (An example of a brief public information video can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rsw-ErFM2lc>)

The City certainly wants to continue to make this environmental effort successful so it is important that we now, through our own Public Health Department, add this educational component to keep our residents safe.

Fiscal Impact:

None

Recommendation:

By motion of the City Council, request that the City Manager direct the Public Health Officer to develop and informational campaign for local grocery stores about the proper care and cleaning of reusable bags to prevent the transmission of harmful bacteria.