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Whole Foods will ditch plastic bags in grocery stores

Eco-friendly move kicks off in April

By ANNE PAINE
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Whole Foods is phasing out those fly-away plastic bags in which shoppers tote their purchases away from grocery and other stores, and it's not the only one taking a stand to protect the environment from them.

San Francisco outlawed them at large grocery stores last year, and China — recognizing the problems they cause with litter, clogged waterways and petroleum consumed to create them — announced this month they would be banned as of June 1.

The natural and organic foods supermarket that opened recently in Nashville will no longer give out the disposable bags as of Earth Day, which is April 22 this year, Whole Foods officials said.

"More and more cities and countries are beginning to place serious restrictions on single-use plastic shopping bags since they don't break down in our landfills, can harm nature by clogging waterways and endangering wildlife, and litter our roadsides," A.C. Gallo, co-president and chief operating officer for Whole Foods Market, said in a statement.

He estimated his company's actions could keep "100 million new plastic grocery bags out of our environment between Earth Day and the end of this year alone."

"Doing away with plastic grocery bags won't just help protect marine life, it's a key move in shifting us away from a 'consume-and-dispose' mentality," said Lisa Mastny, editor of the Worldwatch Institute report *Oceans in Peril*. "Disposable plastic bags can linger in the environment for more than 1,000 years and are the major debris item found on the seabed, especially near the coast."

Free paper bags offered

Shoppers are encouraged to take their own bags to grocery stores, and Whole Foods and several grocery chains sell reusable bags.

Whole Foods will offer several options: free paper bags in four sizes made from 100 percent recycled paper, reusable bags made from 80 percent recycled plastic bottles for 99 cents and canvas bags selling for \$6.99 to \$35. It encourages shoppers to bring their own bags by taking 5 cents to 10 cents off the bill for each.

In China, which has 1.3 billion people, businesses will be prohibited from manufacturing, selling or using bags less than 0.025 millimeters — that's 0.00098 inches — thick, according to The Associated Press.

More durable plastic bags still will be permitted for sale by markets and shops.

In the U.S., Sierra Club's *Sierra* magazine estimates about 100 billion plastic bags are thrown out yearly.
