

City of Modesto  
Citizens Advisory Committee on  
Recycling

City Council Proposal:  
Alternatives to Blue Bag Recycling

# Current Practice

- Blue plastic bags ("Big Blue") deposited into black residential garbage cans
  - What goes in it?
    - Tin, steel, aluminum cans
    - Plastic and glass bottles and jars
- Green cans
  - Now accept newspapers, other clean paper, cardboard and food waste
  - Greatly reduced quantity of recycling

# The Problem with Big Blue

- Poor type of recycling container
  - Difficult for garbage contractors to separate from other garbage
  - A tour of garbage facilities indicates:
    - Only a small percentage of blue bags retrieved from garbage heaps
    - Of those retrieved, at least 70-80% were either filled with contaminants or contaminated through the pickup process
  - Because of their availability as grocery bags, many people use blue bags for trash rather than recycling

# The Problem with Big Blue

- Poor environmental message

- It makes no sense...From the mouth of a seven year old just learning about recycling from a school presentation about the City's recycling program...

"How come we have to put our recyclables in a plastic bag when we're supposed to stop using them?"

# Say "No" to Plastic Bags

- AB 2449 effective July 1, 2007
  - Requires most grocers and pharmacies to provide bins for the collection and recycling of plastic bags brought back by customers
- California Plastic Bag Facts Existing Prior to Adoption of AB 2449:
  - 600 bags generated every second
  - 19 billion plastic carryout bags used each year
  - Only 5% of plastic bags were being recycled
  - Plastic bags accounted for 73,000 tons of landfill material each year
  - Enough bags were thrown away each year to encircle the globe 250 times over
  - Cutting plastic bag waste in half would save 2,000 barrels of oil a day

# Recycling Solutions Proposal Goals

1. Cost-effectiveness and ease of implementation
2. Overall effectiveness as recycling option
3. Minimal environmental impact; environmentally friendly
4. Encourages community participation and education
5. Ease of use by citizens
6. Provides clear message of protecting the earth

# Development of our Recycling Solutions Proposal

- Because of likely high costs, we will not be considering either a blue can alternative, or the possibility of improving sorting systems at transfer stations. Both, however, are seen as effective recycling options.

# Our Proposal

1. Continue to promote conservation and the use of the green can to recycle newspaper, cardboard, etc.

# Our Proposal

- 2. As a community, support fee levied on all containers: expansion of the CA Bottle Bill (see letter).

# Our Proposal

3. Discontinue blue bag program at grocery stores (Change to white or paper bags).

# Our Proposal

- 4. Rotate recycling stations on monthly basis (as is done with toxic waste). This could also fill need for apartment/condo dwellers who have no recycling option.

# Our Proposal

- 5. For community members who prefer use of blue bags, offer compostable bags which could be purchased from the city or grocery stores

# Our Proposal

6. Encourage community groups, e.g., high school recycling clubs, churches, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc., to become more involved in recycling efforts
  - n These groups can both continue and expand their own recycling programs, and also provide recycling education and outreach to other community groups

# Summary

- The blue bag program has failed in all ways:
  - citizen compliance
  - ease of management by garbage contractors
  - environmental soundness
  - usefulness and convenience for all community members
  - overly expensive for what we get from it
  - helps little to meet our state-mandated reduction of garbage goals