



Retailers Join City Recycling Program

**DOMINICK'S AND WALGREENS TO PACK BUYS IN BLUE BAGS
BY DAN MIHALOPOULOS, TRIBUNE STAFF REPORTER**

The following is excerpted from an article appearing in the Chicago Tribune on June 20, 2004.

In the latest attempt to bolster its sputtering blue-bag recycling program, the city has persuaded Dominick's and Walgreens stores to pack purchases in blue bags that shoppers can later fill with recyclables.

Chicago officials said the new approach makes it easier for the public to participate in the city's voluntary recycling effort, which calls on people to separate paper, metal, plastic, glass and yard waste from garbage, putting the items for recycling in blue bags.

"Once they have a few of these bags lying around the house, Chicagoans might even find it pretty difficult not to recycle," said Al Sanchez, commissioner of the city's Department of Streets and Sanitation.

Officials for Dominick's and Walgreens said they would have to pay 25 to 50 cents more for every thousand blue bags, compared with the cost of the brown plastic bags they normally use.

But store officials said their companies agreed to switch to blue bags at Mayor Richard Daley's request. Customers will receive blue bags unless they request the brown bags.

"We would hope that other retailers take note of their actions and follow suit," Sanchez said.

City officials asked the Jewel and Whole Foods chains to bag groceries in blue bags, but those companies have not yet agreed, said Sadhu Johnston, the

mayor's aide for environmental initiatives. A Jewel spokeswoman said Friday the chain has not yet decided whether it will make the switch. Whole Foods officials did not return calls.

When the blue-bag program began in 1996, officials said they hoped to divert 25 percent of the city's paper, cans, glass and other trash from landfills to be reused.

The city hit that target within three years, but since 2001 the numbers have fallen to 22 percent, Johnston said. Less than a third of Chicago homes use the blue bags.

The city announced another pilot program designed to boost blue-bag participation in February. Under that program in the 47th Ward, residents can apply free stickers to regular garbage cans that contain recyclables. The bags with stickers are pulled out at sorting stations, just as blue bags are. The pilot program may be expanded citywide, city officials said.

Recycling activists say the city would be better served by a curbside program like those in Chicago suburbs and in many cities.

Chicago's recycling rate puts it well behind national pacesetters Seattle and Los Angeles but ahead of several other large cities, including New York, Boston, Dallas and Philadelphia, according to Waste News, a trade publication.

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