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N. J. L A W

Law Tames Wanderlust Of Shopping Carts

By CHARLENE OLDHAM

JERSEY CITY
Not long ago, Jersey City residents were nearly as likely to find a shopping cart on their street corner as in their supermarket.

But that has begun to change since the City Council passed an ordinance last year authorizing the Police Department and the Department of Public Works to collect and impound abandoned carts and levy a fine of up to \$50 on anyone using a cart outside a store's parking lot.

While the thought of being fined for a shopping-cart-related offense seems laughable, Mayor Bret Schundler said that abandoned shopping carts, often used by vagrants to collect scrap metal, were a serious issue to many community groups.

"Open-air drug markets are certainly a bigger problem," Mr. Schundler said. "But things like litter and abandoned shopping carts and the disorderliness that they suggest are also a problem."

That disorderliness prompted Mr. Schundler and other city officials to press for the ordinance, under which grocery stores and other businesses can reclaim wayward carts for \$5 each plus an impound fee of \$1 a day. Carts unclaimed after six months can be auctioned off by the city, but the first auction, scheduled for last summer, was called off because of a lack of carts, said Kevin Sluka, the Public Works Director.

"We never had a need for it," said Mr. Sluka, who drafted the ordinance now enforced by the Department of Neighborhood Improvement, formerly an arm of the Public Works Department. "Originally, we didn't expect so many carts to be claimed."

Supermarkets have also responded in Bayonne, which adopted a similar ordinance. "If we get to the carts first, they have to pay for it," said

Stephen Gallo, assistant business administrator for Bayonne's Department of Public Works. "So it has made them more diligent in picking them up before then."

Supermarkets' eagerness to reclaim errant carts isn't so surprising, considering that a new one can cost more than \$100. Nonetheless, at least one store manager said it was not cheap to comply with the ordinance.

"One time we had to pay something like \$2,500 to get a lot of our carts back," said George Martinez, manager at the Foodmart International in Boyle Plaza. "And we pay a guy to retrieve carts from the lot. So we lose in two ways."

Other stores use different methods to keep their carts close to home. For example, some have a lock-and-key system that requires a 25-cent deposit. Popping a quarter in a slot releases a cart chained to a line of other carts; a shopper gets the

quarter back when he hooks the cart up to others in the corral. Elsewhere, including the Edwards Grocery Store on John F. Kennedy Boulevard, barriers prevent shoppers from taking carts into the parking lot.

While the ordinance has meant headaches for some store managers and shoppers, they agree with city officials that it has also meant fewer shopping carts on the street. And the number of carts being picked up has dropped off sharply; one Department of Neighborhood Improvement employee estimated more than 2,000 carts were collected in the first week the ordinance was in effect.

These days, the agency picks up an average of 550 carts a week, according to its director, Maureen Corrado.

As for fines, she said she did not think any had been assessed since her department began enforcing ordinance about six months ago.

It seems at least some shoppers have decided they would rather carry their purchases home than risk a \$50 ticket.



Dith Pran/The New York Times

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