

## Cuffe moots free toy ban in fast-food restaurants

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Food minister Ciaran Cuffe said he will consider banning fast-food companies such as McDonalds and Burger King from providing children's toys and other promotions with unhealthy meals, in a move aimed at combating the growing problem of childhood obesity.

If introduced here, the measure would follow the example set by Santa Clara County in California, USA, which is preparing to introduce the ban next August despite strong opposition from the restaurant industry there. San José city in Santa Clara is twinned with Dublin city.

Under the ban, which aims to break the link between eating unhealthy food and rewards of toys and prizes, restaurants will be required to ensure that any menu item or children's meal meets minimum nutritional standards before a restaurant can offer an incentive for its purchase.

Cuffe, a Green party minister of state, told the Sunday Tribune that he was open to looking at whether such a ban could be introduced here.

"We have to look at all possible measures we have to take to tackle obesity," he said. "There is a real danger from the association of giveaways and gimmicks with fast food, so this is obviously something we would have to look at. But at the same time I do believe we have to be careful not to overregulate."

He said he would have to consult his fellow ministers at the departments of enterprise and health to explore the feasibility of such a move in Ireland. He added that he also wishes to see the introduction of a "traffic light" system of food labelling here.

The man who orchestrated the Santa Clara County ban, local elected politician Ken Yeager, said it was intended as a tool for busy parents trying to make healthy choices for their children.

However, he warned that he encountered significant resistance to the move from restaurants, which he said spend hundreds of millions of dollars on toys and prizes tempting children to eat their food.

"The restaurant industry, especially the fast food industry, is notoriously resistant to change. The California Restaurant Association took out full-page ads in our local newspaper decrying the measure. Franchise owners from McDonald's and other restaurants came to testify against it," he said.

"As a legislator, it can be hard to be the first to take a stance on an issue. But it can pay off."