



DATE: January 24, 2018

TO: Waste Management Authority Board

FROM: Wendy Sommer, Executive Director

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SUBJECT: Overview of Local Government Efforts Concerning Plastic Straws

SUMMARY

At the September 27, 2017 WMA Board meeting, the Board requested that staff report back with information concerning efforts at the local government level to regulate the distribution of plastic straws by businesses.

DISCUSSION

According to the National Park Service, it is estimated that Americans discard approximately 500 million plastic straws every day. Plastic straws, like other single-use disposable items such as soft drink bottles, plastic clamshell food containers, cigarette lighters and grocery bags are inexpensive to produce and have become ubiquitous. They also are of low economic value to recyclers, and as a consequence are less likely to be disposed of prudently and often end up littering beaches or polluting waterways. Plastic straws in particular have become ingrained in consumer culture, and are commonly provided with drinks by default, even though they may be unnecessary for consumption of the beverage being served. Most straws are made from a petroleum-based plastic called polypropylene. Due to their small size, straws also can be mistaken for food by animals and because of their shape, can cause suffocation and death to marine wildlife.

Nevertheless, advocates for the disabled community have cautioned that straws do play an important role in assisting the day-to-day lives of members of the public who suffer from various disabilities that impede their ability to use their hands or arms, or for others with various medical conditions such as recurrent cold sores, facial palsy, or temporomandibular joint dysfunction. As a result, such advocates caution against overly-restrictive regulations that would impede access to straws for those who need them.

A number of jurisdictions throughout the West Coast have been exploring or formally adopting regulations that incorporate various approaches to address this issue, including the cities of Berkeley, Alameda, Davis, Manhattan Beach, as well as Santa Cruz County and the City of Seattle. The breadth and scope of these regulations vary, with cities such as Davis taking a relatively modest approach by simply requiring that restaurants and businesses only distribute plastic straws when specifically requested by a customer. Other agencies, such as the cities of Manhattan Beach and Alameda have taken stronger approaches that include outright bans on the sale or distribution of

various plastic food service ware products, including drinking straws. The table below provides examples of jurisdictions with straw-related regulations and the specific approaches they have taken.

Municipality	Scope	Status
Davis	Requires dine-in restaurants to ask customers if they want beverage straws prior to providing them and to provide the straws only if explicitly requested	Ordinance Adopted: May 2017 Effective date: Sept. 1, 2017 Outreach to businesses: May 2017-Jan. 2018
Berkeley	The City is exploring creation of an ordinance prohibiting use of plastic straws in bars, restaurants and coffee shops	May 30, 2017: City Council directs Zero Waste Commission to explore issue Fall 2017: Zero Waste Commission Foodware Subcommittee discussing draft language
Alameda	Prohibits food vendors from providing single-use drinking straws to customers, unless specifically requested. Straws or disposable food ware that are supplied must be reusable, recyclable (i.e. aluminum), or compostable (i.e. paper)	Sept. 19, 2017: Revised Ordinance Adopted January 1, 2018: Effective date of new requirements July 1, 2018: Commencement of Enforcement
Manhattan Beach	Prohibits food providers from distributing or selling polystyrene food service ware, including polypropylene straws	April 1, 2014: Revised Ordinance Adopted
Santa Cruz County (applies only in unincorporated areas)	All take-away food service ware provided to customers must be recyclable or compostable, as certified by the Biodegradable Products Institute	January 1, 2017: Effective date of ordinance
Seattle	Prohibits distribution of plastic straws and utensils	July 1, 2018: Revised Seattle Public Utilities ordinance goes into effect

In addition to the above agencies that have adopted ordinances formally regulating the distribution of plastic straws or disposable food ware, there are many other communities where local non-governmental community organizations have spearheaded campaigns encouraging voluntary efforts to minimize or eliminate the use of plastic straws.

Examples of such voluntary efforts include:

1. Encouraging businesses to participate in national and local green certification programs such as Bay Area Green Business or [ReThink Disposable](#). Stop Waste is partnering with Clean Water Fund to launch 2018 ReThink Disposable to provide free assistance and reusable food ware incentive funding to help 10-15 businesses in Alameda County reduce single use packaging in the food service industry.
2. Encouraging residents to pledge to join the "[be straw free](#)" campaign and reduce waste by:
 - Asking for no straw when eating out or on the go
 - Purchasing and using reusable straws when needed
 - Encouraging others to go straw-free
3. Encouraging or requiring city-sponsored events to be straw free

4. Supporting programs like the Watershed Project, which is encouraging students to lobby local restaurants to reduce disposables
5. Supporting the [Ocean Litter Strategy](#) that is being organized by the State of California's [Ocean Protection Council](#)
6. Supporting legislation to address this issue.

Assemblymember Calderon recently introduced AB1884, a “straw on request only” bill at sit down restaurants. Staff will monitor and report on this bill as part of our legislative agenda.

At this point, staff recommends that any policy direction regarding this item be discussed in November, as part of the 2018-20 priority setting exercise.

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for information only.