



DATE: July 12, 2018

TO: Programs & Administration Committee

FROM: Pat Cabrera, Administrative Services Director

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SUBJECT: Food Service Packaging, Litter and Marine Debris

SUMMARY

At its May 23, 2018 meeting, the WMA Board adopted a process and timeline for its fall Priority Setting, which will update guiding principles to inform the Agency's focus, work plan and budget for the next two years. This report and presentation on food service packaging and marine debris is part of a series of presentations to provide context and background for a thoughtful decision-making process.

DISCUSSION

Pollution associated with single-use plastics, including food ware (straws, cups, lids, utensils, takeout containers) and plastic bags has increased in prominence as an international environmental issue in recent years. Media coverage is at an all-time high, and has contributed to greater public awareness and desire to take action. There is greater pressure on the industries linked to the proliferation of single-use plastic items that often end up as contamination in compost, litter on land or in marine environments.

Urgency of the issue has been buoyed by alarming data on the scale of the problem. A 2015 Ocean Conservancy/McKinsey study estimates greater than 80% of ocean plastic originates from land-based sources, and another study found that 60% of the land-based plastic in the ocean originates from five Asian countries. Locally, Clean Water Action's Bay Area litter study identified that food and beverage packaging comprises a majority of the litter in our region.

The issues related to single-use plastics are complex and lack a straightforward solution. There has been significant research and investment into compostable and other degradable plastics, but actual performance, certification/labeling, collection and processing remain fraught with challenges. Many items end up as contamination in the recycling and composting streams or become litter in the environment where they can break down into microscopic pieces, becoming increasingly toxic by absorbing contaminants from municipal and agricultural runoff. Wildlife mistake plastic pieces for food, which then passes plastics up the food chain. Alternative fiber-based food ware often contains harmful fluorinated compounds (PFA's) that persist and can bioaccumulate in living organisms.

There is increasing recognition that recycling is not a viable solution for the endless flow of small plastic items, particularly those used for food service. Material Recovery Facilities are not equipped to deal with small-sized items, and there is now zero tolerance for food contamination. Currently around 9% of plastics are captured for recycling or recovery worldwide.

In order to develop a thoughtful and effective approach to this issue, we need to consider the lens we are viewing the issue through, the problem we are trying to solve, and the most effective role for StopWaste:

- Waste Reduction – focus on reducing the amount of single-use plastics produced to address stormwater/marine pollution from plastics discarded as litter, illegal dumping, or other uncontrolled dispersion into the environment. Support reusables to enable a shift away from single-use plastic food ware and related packaging.
- Toxics Reduction – focus on eliminating the use of fluorinated compounds in fiber-based packaging, to allow these materials to be used for human consumption and enter the composting stream without adverse environmental and human health effects.
- Proper Recycling – focus on maximizing recycling or composting of food service ware and packaging discarded into the formal solid waste system and keeping materials out of the landfill and contaminants out of the recycling and compost.

Efforts to Date

StopWaste

Up to this point, StopWaste has emphasized voluntary waste reduction and choosing reusables whenever possible, in support of circular economy principles to keep materials cycling through the economy as higher value products. With our support, the Rethink Disposable campaign (www.rethinkdisposable.org) has reached 430 businesses, with 50 sites implementing measures that reduced over 11,000 lbs. of disposable single-use food ware products. The *Purchasing Compostable Food Service Ware* guide provides food service operations with information on compostable/recyclable purchasing choices when single-use items must be used. The Agency also supports the Reuse to Go campaign (www.reusetogo.org), a regional reuse campaign developed through the Bay Area Recycling Outreach Coalition in partnership with the nine Bay Area counties.

Our countywide Reusable Bag Ordinance has reduced the number of bags used and flowing into the storm water system since 2013. While solid waste reduction and resource conservation are achieved to some extent, a major success of the ordinance has been litter reduction and increased public awareness.

State and Local

- In California, the current legislative session includes six bills aimed at reducing plastic pollution.
- Many local governments around the country, including over 100 in California, have adopted a food ware ordinance of some kind to address this waste stream.
- At least 12 jurisdictions in Alameda County already have expanded polystyrene (EPS) food ware bans in place, with several also requiring all compostable or recyclable packaging for food ware.
- Alameda and Oakland passed ordinances requiring straws by request, and Berkeley and other cities in Alameda County are considering new policies targeting all takeout food ware.

International

A number of jurisdictions around the globe have employed legislative and policy tools to address single-use plastics. Several countries, such as France, India, and the United Kingdom have passed legislation banning specific single-use plastics, and the European Union is currently considering a proposed ban on all single-use plastics.

Private Industry

A number of multinational companies have taken notice and announced commitments as well:

- Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever have pledged to make packaging more recyclable, compostable, biodegradable and from higher recycled content by 2025, and continue to face pressure from major investors organized by As You Sow, a nonprofit shareholder advocacy group based in Oakland.
- Proctor & Gamble aims to reduce its plastic packaging by 20 percent by 2020 and about 90 percent of its packaging is already recyclable.
- McDonald's is phasing out plastic straws from all of their 1,391 stores in the UK.
- IKEA has committed to phase out single use plastic products from its stores and restaurants by 2020.

Additional Opportunities

Given the heightened awareness and assertive approach toward solutions favored by the public and local governments, the presentation of this item will allow time for discussion of approaches StopWaste could take in upcoming years to address the issues outlined above. Some possibilities include:

- Research and develop a countywide food ware ordinance, or customizable model ordinance for local adoption.
- Support Member Agencies with countywide outreach efforts.
- Continue to offer technical assistance and grant funding to businesses for reusable food ware and to brand owners for circular packaging design for reuse, recycling, and composting.
- Develop additional guidance on safe food ware options and waste prevention in food service.
- Support statewide legislation that incorporates design for circularity, such as requiring increased recycled content in single-use plastics to drive increased recycling, and banning problematic materials that are not recyclable, compostable, and that contain PFA's or other harmful additives.

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for information only.