



# Californians Against Waste

Conserving Resources. Preventing Pollution. Protecting the Environment.

November 6, 2018

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors  
Board Chambers, Room 107  
651 Pine St.  
Martinez, CA 94553

**RE: Contra Costa County Proposed Ban of Polystyrene Food and Beverage Containers- SUPPORT**

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Californians Against Waste (CAW) is an environmental policy and advocacy organization with thousands of members across Northern California. We respectfully urge your support for the proposed ban of polystyrene food and beverage containers.

We commend the county for considering an ordinance to regulate the use of polystyrene foam food packaging. Specifically, we commend the proposal to include a requirement that alternative food packaging materials be recyclable. We recommend that the county support the proposed provision that goes beyond regulating food service ware only at food facilities, but also prohibits the retail sale of polystyrene foam coolers and disposable food service ware made from polystyrene foam. These polystyrene products sold at retail and grocery stores are often used outdoors and near waterways where they are more likely to become litter. Even if these retail items disposed of properly, they are likely to be blown out of outdoor waste bins and become litter. We strongly support the proposed provision which would encourage the use of reusable food service ware. The source reduction of food packaging is a key element in reducing litter in the environment and waste sent to landfills. The county should also consider the inclusion of a provision that would allow certified compostable food service ware, specifically referencing standards required by California Public Resources Code, Chapter 5.7, in areas that services for the collection of organic waste is available. This approach would allow those who currently have organic waste collection services the option of using certified compostable food service ware, and creates a mechanism for allowing the use of compostable food service ware for cities that implement organic waste recycling programs in the future. If the county is concerned about allowing products that are not compatible with existing or future compost and anaerobic digestion facilities, the county should consider a provision allowing compostable food service ware only when it is accepted and compatible with the specific facility in which the materials will be processed at.

Polystyrene foam and other non-recyclable, disposable takeout food packaging is a major, and easily preventable, source of pollution. Polystyrene foam is light, easily airborne, and prone to break into small pieces, it can be easily transported by wind and rain into the environment even when “properly” disposed of. With Californians using 165,000 tons of polystyrene each year for packaging and food containers, it is no surprise that beach and river cleanup studies show polystyrene to be one of the most common forms of litter. Plastic pollution has killed thousands of marine birds, sea turtles and other species, and threatens both human health as well as California’s multi-billion dollar ocean-based economy. According to the US EPA, local governments in California spend as

much as \$411 million each year to prevent plastic food packaging and other commonly littered items from ending up in streets, storm drains, beaches, rivers and the ocean. Those opposed to polystyrene foam alternatives due to cost differences do not take into account the burden and hidden cost of cleaning it up after use.

Recycling of this problem material is not a viable option. Despite decades of promises from the plastic industry for a comprehensive recycling infrastructure, no widespread recycling scheme for polystyrene foam has ever been successfully implemented over the long term. Along with limited recycling opportunities, food contamination issues and the lightweight quality of the material make it difficult to successfully recycle. Moreover, due to the low market value of recycled polystyrene, recyclers can actually lose money for recycling the material. The two largest polystyrene manufacturers in California also produce alternative food service containers. Alternative food packaging material has become increasingly cost-effective, and in some instances is cheaper than the environmentally-harmful polystyrene containers.

Plastic pollution is a global problem with local solutions. One hundred and nineteen local jurisdictions in California have already banned polystyrene. These local ordinances have been very successful in removing non-recyclable food packaging from the waste stream without increasing the pollution of food packaging alternatives. Such an accomplishment is a proven solution for combating waste as well as the costs associated with cleanup. We commend the County's leadership and urge your support for the proposed ban of polystyrene food and beverage containers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Murray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Murray  
Executive Director  
Californians Against Waste

CC: Chief Assistant Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, Jami Napier  
Principal Planner, John Cunningham  
District I Supervisor John M. Gioia  
District II Supervisor Candace Anderson  
District III Supervisor Diane Burgis  
District IV Supervisor Karen Mitchoff  
District V Supervisor Federal D. Glover