

MONTEREY REGIONAL WASTE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Why Prohibit the Use of Polystyrene Food Packaging?

The Proliferation of Plastic

According to the California Integrated Waste Management Board, plastics are the fastest-growing segment of the waste stream. While the use of plastic for packaging and consumer products continues to increase, plastic recycling is stalled at approximately 5 percent, much lower than the recycling rate for materials such as paper, glass and metal.

Of the six plastic resin types commonly used for packaging, polystyrene “Styrofoam” (coded #6) has been singled out for fast food packaging bans in more than 25 California cities and counties, and more than 100 US cities nationwide.

Environmental Impacts of Polystyrene

A widely reported environmental impact from polystyrene (PS) containers results from improper disposal and litter. Unlike a paper cup or plate, a single PS plate or cup can break into hundreds of inert bits. Locally, data compiled by volunteers from the Surfrider Foundation shows that bits of PS foam comprise the largest number of items they collect during periodic beach cleanups in Monterey County.

Although a Styrofoam take-out container is designed to transport food for a short period of time, it will last forever whether in a landfill or in the environment as litter. According to the California Coastal Commission, 60 to 80 percent of all marine debris and 90 percent of floating debris is plastic.

Environmental Stewardship

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is a federally protected marine area encompassing one of the globe’s most diverse marine ecosystems. The Sanctuary was established for the purpose of resource protection, research, education, and public use of this national treasure. Protecting this 5,322 square-mile area is the responsibility of everyone, particularly those of us who live and work in the Central Coast region.

Polystyrene is not collected for recycling in the Central Coast region because the material is light, bulky and inefficient to transport, and because there are no regional manufacturers using this material as a feedstock. When polystyrene can be recycled, such as into molded packaging blocks, recycled content can be as high as 25%, but is typically much lower. By comparison, paper, glass and aluminum can all be used to create 100% recycled content products.

We have seen first-hand the impact of polystyrene plastic litter in our fields, on our roadways and highways, in storm drains, the ocean and on our beaches. Banning polystyrene take-out packaging locally will help to address marine pollution by requiring the use of environmentally preferable alternatives while helping to educate business owners and citizens on the positive impact their packaging choices can make.

Thank You for Your Support of Environmentally Friendly Packaging Alternatives

The Monterey Regional Waste Management District is pleased to provide you with this free environmentally friendly food packaging starter kit. We think the local company Passion Purveyors for delivering them to you. These products are stocked locally by Passion Purveyors and other packaging retailers. Using environmentally friendly packaging sends a positive message about your business and your concern for our local environment. We’re sure your customers will notice and appreciate your commitment!

