

TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS

DATE: APRIL 27, 2009 CMR:215:09

REPORT TYPE: INFORMATION

SUBJECT: Plastics Policy for City of Palo Alto Operations and Events

This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

BACKGROUND

Single-use plastic products have increased dramatically in recent years and approximately 60% of the litter found in Santa Clara County Creeks is plastic. Plastic debris is accumulating in the Pacific Ocean impacting marine organisms as this debris is conveyed out to sea. To address this problem, the City has taken action to restrict plastic bags and is considering action to restrict expanded polystyrene, another type of plastic.

DISCUSSION

To insure that City operations and events are controlling single-use plastic products consistent with the restrictions being imposed in the business community, staff have drafted the attached Policy. Following review by City Departments and approval by the City Manager, it will be placed in the Policy and Procedures Manual and staff will implement it. The Policy states that, "It shall be the Policy of the City of Palo Alto at City facilities, City-managed concessions, and City sponsored events that:

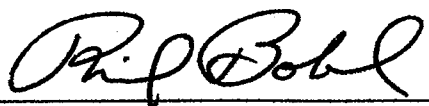
1. Single-use plastic bags shall not be distributed, effective on September 18, 2009.
2. Single-use plastic water containers shall not be distributed or sold after September 18, 2009.
3. Polystyrene food containers shall not be distributed or sold after April 22, 2010.

The Policy shall not apply to Emergency Response actions.

ATTACHMENT

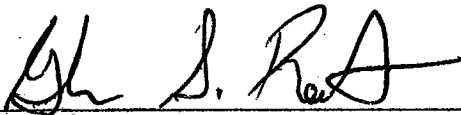
Attachment A: City of Palo Alto Policy on Plastics

PREPARED BY:



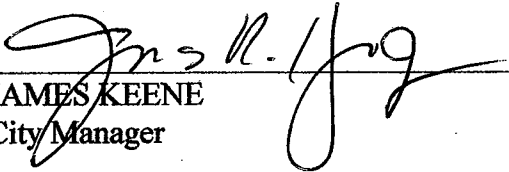
PHIL BOBEL
Manager Environmental Compliance Division

DEPARTMENT HEAD:



GLENN S. ROBERTS
Director of Public Works

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:



JAMES KEENE
City Manager

City of Palo Alto Policy on Plastics**I. Findings**

The Pacific Ocean contains an accumulation of plastic debris. Some scientists estimate that the density of plastic can be as great as one million pieces of plastic per square mile. According to the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program, 60 percent of the litter found in Bay Area creeks is plastic. It is the City of Palo Alto's duty to protect the natural environment and natural resources for its citizens. This includes exercising environmental stewardship by reducing the amount of plastic being released to the City's ecosystem and beyond.

Litter in Palo Alto (mostly bags, packaging and single-use disposable products) is conveyed to local creeks, into San Francisco Bay and into the Pacific Ocean by wind, illegal dumping, and through storm drains. Plastic does not completely biodegrade in the marine environment as paper does, instead breaking down into smaller and smaller pieces, accumulating toxins and harming marine animals when it is mistaken for food. As a result, plastic checkout bags have been found to adversely impact many wildlife species that ingest or become entangled in them.

The use of plastic checkout bags and polystyrene food containers has increased dramatically in recent years. Many of these products end up littering the landscape and contaminating creeks, bays and oceans. Even with the emphasis on recycling of plastics in the last several decades, the plastic checkout bag recycling rate in California remains at approximately 5% or less, according to the California Integrated Waste Management Board

Although polystyrene is considered an inexpensive and effective product, it has many drawbacks and hidden costs which are deferred to the public and the environment. Expanded Polystyrene waste constitutes 15% of the litter collected in storm drains, and is the second most abundant type of marine debris. Polystyrene foam presents unique management issues because of its lightweight nature, floatability, and the ease at which it breaks into smaller pieces. The small pieces are extremely resistant to biodegradation and can be similar in size to plankton, posing a significant risk of ingestion and ultimate starvation to marine wildlife. At least 162 marine species including most seabirds have been reported to have eaten plastics and other litter.

Both of the major chemicals which can be used in the production of polystyrene, Benzene (a known human carcinogen) and Styrene (a possible carcinogen and neurotoxin), have been suspected to leach from the polystyrene food containers, as stated by the EPA and FDA posing a threat to the environment and, ultimately, human health

II. Policy

It is therefore in the best interests of the public health, safety, and welfare to minimize the use of single use plastic products within the boundaries of the City of Palo Alto. It is the intent of this Policy to reduce the negative impacts of single use plastic products and encourage the use of reusable alternatives.

Specifically, it shall be the Policy of the City of Palo Alto at City facilities, City-managed concessions, and City sponsored events that:

1. Single Use Plastic Bags shall not be distributed, effective on September 18, 2009.
2. Polystyrene Food Containers shall not be distributed or sold after April 22, 2010.
3. Single Use Plastic Water Containers shall not be distributed or sold after September 18, 2009.

This policy will be included in the Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Chapter of the Palo Alto Purchasing Manual and shall be implemented via contracts, purchase orders and agreements with events managers. The policy shall not apply to emergency response actions.