



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF VENTURA**

GOVERNMENT CENTER, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
800 SOUTH VICTORIA AVENUE, VENTURA, CALIFORNIA 93009

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October 12, 2004

Board of Supervisors
800 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, CA 93009

SUBJECT: Adoption of Prohibition on Expandable Polystyrene Food Containers

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt the attached resolution prohibiting the use of expandable polystyrene food service products at the County harbor, parks, Government Center, and County-sponsored events.

DISCUSSION:

Expandable polystyrene, commonly referred to by the trade name "Styrofoam", is a food product container material that incurs excessive environmental impacts in comparison to readily available alternatives. Because of its lightweight and nonporous nature, EPS is readily wind blown and floats without become saturated. Further, rather than decomposing, it breaks into small pieces that last for decades or longer. These characteristics make EPS an especially troublesome source of creek, beach, and water contamination. A single food container can become strewn along miles of creeks and beaches. Carried by wind, storm water, or tides, EPS pieces are a leading source of beach litter, and at sea become a significant hazard to marine life.

Many large fast-food chains have replaced their expandable polystyrene (EPS) containers with more environmentally friendly products, and within the last year, several California coastal cities have enacted prohibitions similar to the one that is proposed today. As a coastal county with a harbor, coastal parks, and parks along creeks or rivers, it would be appropriate for our Board take action to do our part in reducing the impacts of EPS.


Expandable polystyrene is a petroleum-based product that is frequently used for food packaging purposes. This material is currently non-recyclable and non-biodegradable (i.e., unable to decay into constituent substances). Because of its inability to decompose, food service EPS waste is consuming an ever-increasing amount of space within landfill facilities. Moreover, EPS waste products are detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of the general public, as well as the ecosystem, for reasons which include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) EPS is especially prone to become litter and is capable of lasting indefinitely within the urban landscape, thereby contributing to urban blight; 2) EPS that enters the creeks and the ocean, through both direct and indirect means, and deteriorates the quality of ocean waters and adjacent beach areas, which degrades the visitor experience and impacts tourism; and 3) EPS threatens the earth's fragile ecological balance as marine and terrestrial wildlife often perish after ingesting EPS products.

A study by the California Integrated Waste Management Board found that "at least 162 marine species, including most seabirds, have been reported to have eaten plastics and other litter.... PS is of particular concern because it is light, it floats, and it is highly visible. In addition, PS foam breaks into small pieces, increasing the chance of ingestion by wildlife and increasing the difficulty and cost of collection. Ingestion of PS pieces, which look like food to many species, results in reduced appetite, reduced nutrient adsorption, and starvation for wildlife."

Adoption of the proposed resolution will prohibit EPS food containers from the county facilities where it is most likely to enter a water body or affect wildlife. Additionally, prohibiting EPS at the Government Center will make an appropriate contribution to the reduction of EPS food containers overall, and demonstrate good environmental stewardship while serving as a model for other organizations.

My staff has discussed this proposal with staff of the affected departments and they support the policy and believe it can be easily implemented at negligible cost.

Cordially,



Steve Bennett
Supervisor, First District

Attachment- Resolution

A RESOLUTION OF
THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF
VENTURA PROHIBITING THE USE OF EXPANDABLE
POLYSTYRENE (COMMONLY REFERRED TO BY THE
TRADE NAME "STYROFOAM")

WHEREAS, the litter problem resulting from expandable polystyrene is becoming increasingly difficult to manage, contaminates creeks and the ocean, and has costly negative implications for tourism, wildlife, aesthetics and most recently, public storm drain systems; and

WHEREAS, expandable polystyrene, a petroleum based product that is frequently used for food service purposes, enters various water bodies from both direct as well as indirect sources (such as storm conveyance systems), and negatively impacts the overall quality of stream and ocean waters and adjacent beach areas; and

WHEREAS, expandable polystyrene does not effectively biodegrade (decay into constituent substances) in the environment, but merely breaks down into smaller particles that litter streets, parks, public places, open spaces, creeks, beaches, and the ocean: and

WHEREAS, expandable polystyrene waste poses a risk to fish and wildlife, as fish and marine and land wildlife perish as a result of ingesting expandable polystyrene products; and

WHEREAS, expandable polystyrene contributes to urban blight as litter, especially due to the fact that its lightweight nature causes it to float in water and be transported by wind even when disposed of properly; and

WHEREAS, expandable polystyrene products, when used for food service purposes, have a useful life that can be measured in minutes or hours, yet it takes from several decades to hundreds of years to deteriorate in the environment or landfill; and

WHEREAS there is currently no meaningful recycling of expandable polystyrene food service products, due in part to contamination from food residue, and

WHEREAS, alternative products, which are bio-degradable, less prone to wind and water transport, reusable and/or recyclable are readily available at reasonable cost; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors desires to exercise environmental stewardship by reducing the amount of expandable polystyrene debris that enters the storm drains, watersheds, and the coastal environment by reducing the amount of expandable polystyrene that enters our waste stream.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Supervisors of the County of Ventura does hereby resolve as follows:

Section 1. The County Harbor Department, GSA Parks Departments and GSA Facilities Department shall prohibit the use of expandable polystyrene food service products by vendors, franchisees, lessees, contractors or other commercial food and beverage purveyors at all Harbor, Park, and County Government Center facilities. Prohibited products include, but are not limited to, expandable polystyrene food containers, bowls, plates, trays, cartons, and cups which are not intended for reuse, on or in which any foods or beverages are placed or packaged. The Harbor, Parks, and Facilities Departments should incorporate this prohibition into ordinances, leases, permits, agreements, etc., at the earliest opportunity and strive to fully and expeditiously implement the prohibition.

Section 2. The use or distribution of expandable polystyrene food service products at special events at County facilities that are sponsored or co-sponsored by the County shall be prohibited. This prohibition shall apply to the event organizers, agents of the event organizers, event vendors, and any other party (including non-profit organizations) who have an agreement with one or more of the co-sponsors of the event to sell goods or beverages at the event or otherwise provide an event-related service. The prohibition on the use of expandable polystyrene food service products will not be enforced upon individuals who are attending the function solely as a visitor or spectator. Written agreements with any vendor, including non-profit organizations, to sell food or beverages at an event that is sponsored or co-sponsored by the County of Ventura, shall specifically prohibit the usage and distribution of expandable polystyrene food service products.

Section 3. All individuals, groups, businesses, non-governmental, and other governmental entities are strongly encouraged to assist in preserving the environment by ceasing to purchase and use expandable polystyrene food service products.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this _____ day of October, 2004.

Steve Bennett, Chair
Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

JOHN F. JOHNSTON
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura, State of California

By _____
Deputy Clerk of the Board