Plastic Free Washington

Senate Bill 5022: Reducing Plastic Pollution and Improving Recycling

Globally, 33 billion pounds of plastic enters the marine environment every year, devastating the world's oceans.[1] Most plastic does not go away, instead it breaks up into smaller pieces that can be mistaken for food by marine life, often with dire consequences.

Plastic pollution is not only a direct threat to our oceans. Most plastics are made from fossil fuels and are a significant source of global greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change, sea level rise and ocean acidification. By 2050, cumulative greenhouse gas emissions from the full lifecycle of plastics may be equivalent to 615 coal-fired power plants.[2]

Plastics pose a risk to public health as harmful chemicals migrate from plastic packaging into our food and beverages.[3] Plastics also place a huge financial burden on local communities who often bear the costs to clean up plastic waste. Many plastic products are not recyclable in our current systems and therefore cause contamination when they get mixed in with valuable recyclables such as metals, glass and paper, resulting in otherwise recyclable materials ending up as garbage.

Expanded polystyrene, also known as Styrofoam™, is a form of foamed plastic commonly used for food containers and packaging. Polystyrene foam is usually thrown away after a single use and often falls apart easily into smaller pieces that are hard to clean up and may persist in the environment for hundreds of years. Plastic foam packaging is frequently among the 10 most commonly picked up items at beach cleanups.[4]

Disposable plastic forks, spoons, knives and other foodware are also a large part of the plastics problem. Most customers are provided with single-use plastic utensils and condiment packets whether they want them or not. Making single-use utensils, straws and condiments available on request, rather than by default, is a relatively easy way to reduce waste and save costs for businesses.

We must reduce the production and use of single-use plastic, including expanded polystyrene and foodware, and shift to reusable alternatives for the betterment of our environment, public health and local economies.

33 BILLION POUNDS OF PLASTIC ENTERS THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT EVERY YEAR

TAKE ACTION

In Washington, cities and counties like Seattle, Issaquah and San Juan County have already implemented measures to prohibit certain expanded polystyrene food packaging. Seattle also prohibits food service businesses from providing single-use plastic foodware. Now it's time for a state-wide solution.

And there's no time to lose. Without immediate changes to the way we use plastics the total amount of plastic waste generated is expected to double in the next five years, with increasing impacts to our environment and communities.

Contact your Washington legislators today and ask them to *vote YES on SB 5022.*

CLICK HERE to find your legislators and their contact information or call the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000 between 8AM and 7PM, Monday to Friday, to talk to someone who will share your message with your legislators.

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Washington Senate Bill 5022

Washington Senate Bill 5022, championed by Senator Mona Das, is taking on wasteful and harmful single-use plastics. The bill would:

1. Ban the sale or distribution of expanded polystyrene coolers, packing peanuts and food service products like clamshell containers, plates, and cups beginning June 1, 2023. Exceptions are made for the safe packing of medical drugs and devices as well as for meat or fish trays, egg cartons, and other packaging for raw food products requiring refrigeration.

2. Require that food businesses only provide single-use utensils, straws, beverage cup lids and condiment packaging upon customer request. Exemptions are made for cup lids for hot beverages, delivery or curbside pickup, and drive-throughs.

3. Establish recycled content provisions requiring that plastic bottles manufactured or sold in Washington be made of no less than 25 percent post-consumer recycled plastic by 2026 and ramping up to 50 percent post-consumer recycled plastic by 2031.