

Single Use Materials

When ordering takeout at a favorite restaurant, it is easy to see the amount of packaging surrounding a meal: polystyrene foam (commonly referred to by the brand name “Styrofoam”) containers, plastic bags, plastic cups, lids, and straws. Most of these **single use materials** (with plastics being the largest contributor) end up in the trash and are hauled to the landfill. The material that evades the landfill ends up littering the ground and getting into the water supply. These plastics and other single use materials will not be leaving our lives any time soon, so individuals, businesses, and governments have focused on reducing these materials in myriad ways.

Problems with single use materials:

- 40% of all plastic produced is used in packaging - most used only once
- Less than one-fifth of all plastic gets recycled
- Each year, 4 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide and just 1% are recycled
- 18 billion pounds of plastics annually enter the oceans from coastal regions, killing millions of marine animals

Tackling the issue:

- California, along with cities such as Seattle and Washington D.C., has banned plastic straws (replaced by washable or paper straws)
- San Diego recently banned polystyrene foam containers and single use plastics (food vendors may only supply plastic straws and utensils to customers upon request)
- European Union Parliament voted to reduce single use plastics across Europe
- Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle have banned retail plastic bags, while other cities and companies have instituted bag fees
- Companies like Starbucks and McDonalds (in the UK) are phasing out plastic straws
- This year, Sodexo, a large foodservice company, will remove plastic bags and stirrers from 13,000 schools, workplaces, and other sites. They will also phase out polystyrene foam by 2025

Key Definitions

Single Use Materials: packaging that is used once and discarded or recycled (e.g. plastic bags, straws, and bottles)

Biodegradable Plastics: plastics made out of plant or raw materials that are able to decompose in weeks or months. A good option if a community has access to a commercial composting facility

Polystyrene Foam (“Styrofoam”): low-cost, lightweight plastic that easily breaks into miniscule pieces (microplastic) and is generally refused by recycling centers

For more information, please contact Kim Lipetzky with the Fargo Cass Public Health Office at 701-241-8195 or klipetzky@fargond.gov

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