



POLYSTYRENE

Information Bulletin No. 14

Pacific Grove borders the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a federal preserve that supports one of the most diverse and delicate ecosystems in the world. This sanctuary provides habitat for at least 33 mammals, 94 species of seabirds, 345 species of fish, and contains the largest kelp forest in the nation.

Disposable food service-ware made from polystyrene foam is not biodegradable, returnable, or easily recyclable. When discarded after use, polystyrene foam remains permanently in the environment, where it breaks into tiny pieces. Because it is lightweight it may be picked up by the wind and dispersed widely, posing a severe threat to wildlife.

It is not economically feasible at this time to recycle polystyrene foam in or near the city.

Take-out food packaging (such as cups, plates, clamshell containers, and cutlery) that is biodegradable, compostable, or recyclable is the most responsible and sustainable choice for food servicers. The environment, and by extension the tourist economy and citizenry, all benefit from a more sustainable approach to disposable food ware. Such biodegradable takeout packaging made from paper, sugarcane, corn bi-products, and potato starch, is available locally.

In 2008, the City passed an ordinance requiring all food providers within the city utilizing disposable food service ware to use biodegradable, compostable, or recyclable products, unless there is no affordable alternative available. Food providers may charge a "take-out fee" to cover the difference in cost.

The city manager may approve an exemption request to the ordinance in whole or in part, with or without conditions. Violations of the ordinance can result in fines, enforceable in accordance with Chapters 1.16 and 1.19 of the Municipal Code.

Please see the attached listing of some of the types and sources of acceptable take-out food packaging. The prices are competitive with polystyrene foam containers and the long-term benefits to the environment are invaluable.