

**TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL**

**FROM: CITY MANAGER**

**DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS**

**DATE: MARCH 17, 2008**

**CMR:158:08**

**SUBJECT: UPDATE ON POTENTIAL RESTRICTIONS ON SINGLE USE PLASTIC BAGS AND EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE FOOD CONTAINERS**

This is an informational report and no Council action is required. The purpose for the report is to provide background to the Council which will be the basis for Council's upcoming discussion of restrictions on plastic bags and containers.

### **BACKGROUND**

Plastic bag and expanded polystyrene food container (EPSFC) litter escapes to natural ecosystems contributing to a build-up of polyethylene, polystyrene and related compounds in ecosystems, ingestion by marine organisms, and aesthetic degradation of the natural environment. It has not been possible to ensure that a significant fraction of plastic bags and EPSFCs are recycled, and that situation is not expected to change in the foreseeable future.

The City Council discussed the possibility of imposing restrictions on plastics as part of its adoption of the Zero Waste Operational Plan. Several Council Members indicated a desire to see a specific proposal to restrict certain plastics in the near future. At the same time, the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board has been moving toward more substantial requirements to prevent trash and associated plastic from entering creeks and other natural water bodies. Staff is developing recommendations for the Council to consider concerning single use plastic bags and EPSFCs.

### **DISCUSSION**

Details of proposals on plastics are being researched by staff and discussed with affected businesses. Proposals will then be brought to Council for action. The first proposal will be with respect to plastic bags and is anticipated to be ready on April 21, 2008. A proposal on EPSFCs is anticipated to be ready in approximately 6 months.

Staff has prepared background information on plastic bags (Attachment A). Also attached (Attachment B) is a letter from the American Chemistry Council containing their position on a number of the relevant issues. A summary of key findings from Attachment A follows:

- Single-use plastic carryout bags contribute substantially to litter of waterways both in the Bay Area and worldwide. Federal, State and Local government's efforts to address the problem over several decades have failed to reduce the build-up of plastic debris in the marine environment.
- Single-use plastic carryout bags do not degrade in the marine environment for many years and have been found to substantially affect marine life.

- Even with the emphasis on recycling of plastics in the last several decades, the plastic carryout bag recycling rate remains at approximately 5%.
- Reusable carryout bags are considered worldwide to be the best option to reduce waste and litter, protect wildlife and conserve resources. Reusable bags have lower associated greenhouse gas emissions. They are readily available and are affordable for the consumer.
- Plastic bag bans and per bag fee assessments have been enacted by a number of communities around the world. Bans and fee assessments have dramatically reduced the use of plastic bags.

Staff's goal is to reduce the use of plastic bags and EPSFCs, encouraging the use of multi-use containers where practical.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

There are no substantial resource impacts associated with continuing the development of recommendations. Staff will return to Council with a resource analysis of the final recommendations.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Continuing the development of recommendations is consistent with the City's Zero Waste Policy, Climate Action Plan, Storm Water Management Plan, Clean Bay Plan, and Comprehensive Plan.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

A discussion of the need for environmental review will be forwarded to Council as part of the recommendations.

**ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A: Analysis of the Issues Regarding Single-Use Retail Carryout Bags
- Attachment B: American Chemistry Council Letter

PREPARED BY:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 PHIL BOBEL, Manager  
 Environmental Compliance Division

DEPARTMENT HEAD:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 GLENN S. ROBERTS  
 Director of Public Works

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 EMILY HARRISON  
 Assistant City Manager