



Maryland Chapter
P.O Box 278
Riverdale, MD 20738

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 173– “State Buildings and State Highways – Collection of Yard Waste”

Position: Support

Hearing Date: February 7, 2024

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club supports HB 173, which aims to reduce the use of single-use plastic bags for yard waste by State employees or contractors on the grounds of a State building or State highway. It prohibits State employees or contractors from disposing of yard waste collected on the grounds of a State building or a State highway in a single-use plastic container. It further requires that yard waste containers not be discarded with the yard waste unless the yard waste containers are compostable. The prohibition on use of single-use plastic yard waste bags would reduce plastic pollution and contamination of compost at composting facilities.

We have no specific information on where yard waste from the grounds of State buildings and highways currently is sent – whether it is composted or landfilled – and, if composted, whether it is provided in plastic bags. According to correspondence with the Legislative Librarian at the Department of Legislative Services, the three departments that are most involved in yard waste removal are the Department of General Services (DGS), the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DGS already uses reusable containers to dispose of yard waste and MDOT usually collects a large volume of yard waste using heavy machinery that transports it directly to recycling centers. However, DNR and its contractors sometimes do use single-use plastic containers for yard waste, in some cases to contain invasive species and listed noxious weeds. Depending on where invasive species and noxious weeds are sent, single-use plastic containers may or may not be necessary.

Yard waste sent to composting facilities in plastic bags can result in substantial plastic pollution and contamination of the compost (see Exhibit 1). For that reason, at least thirteen counties will not accept yard waste in plastic bags.¹ But this prohibition is not universal, and some counties direct yard waste to a landfill, not a composting facility. The City of Baltimore and the City of Salisbury explicitly require that yard waste be placed in a plastic bag, and the websites of seven counties made no mention of concern for the type of yard waste bags.

While the exact extent of the use of single-use plastic containers to collect yard waste on the grounds of State buildings and highways is uncertain, yard waste is still accepted in plastic bags in some Maryland counties. Reducing plastic pollution in the environment is important and the cost of compliance, according to the fiscal and policy note, is minimal. We respectfully request a favorable report on HB 173.

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Attachment: Exhibit 1 - Shredded plastic bag waste at the Prince George’s County Yard Waste Facility in 2013, before a ban on plastic yard waste bags was enforced

¹ Based on a review of their websites, the following counties explicitly do not accept yard waste in plastic bags: Anne Arundel, Baltimore County, Caroline, Cecil, Charles, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery, Prince George’s, St. Mary’s, Somerset, and Washington (Hagerstown & Boonsboro). Garrett does not accept biodegradable yard waste bags and Worcester does not accept yard waste bags in general. In some of these places, yard waste is sent to a landfill; it is not clear in all cases whether the yard waste is being sent to a composting facility or a landfill.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.

Exhibit 1: Shredded plastic bag waste at the Prince George’s County Yard Waste Facility in 2013, before a ban on plastic yard waste bags was enforced

