

Mobilizing local evidence to reduce single-use plastics:

*Foam food containers and
plastic bags*

Maryland Chapter Jamboree 2019



Maryland Chapter

1. Survey of Food Containers at Restaurants



Objectives

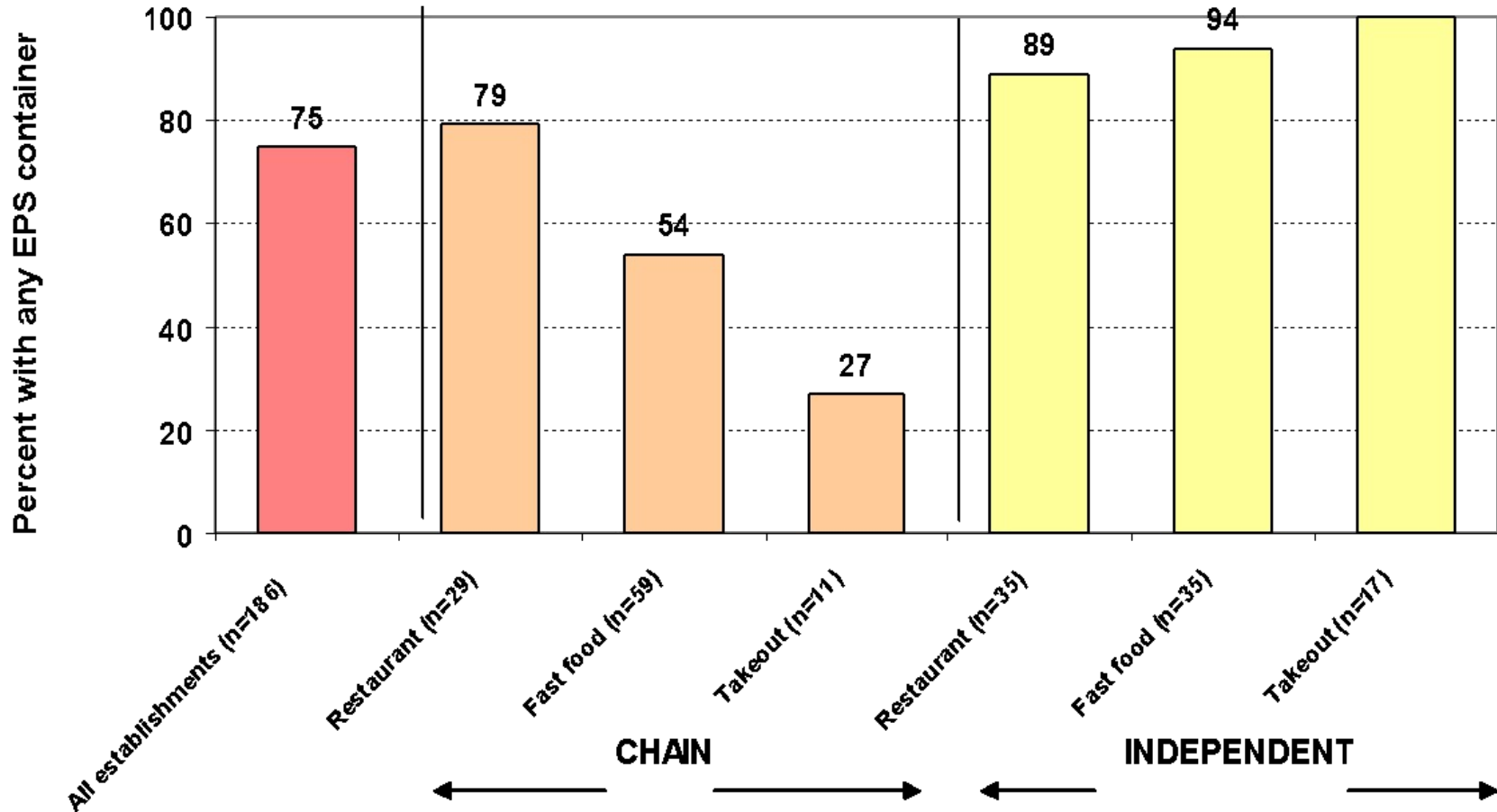
- Find out what % of restaurants in Prince George's County have foam food containers
- Find out what alternatives are already in use
- Follow up after the foam ban is enacted to assess compliance

Sample & Methodology

- Random sample, 15% of restaurants from the public health department (n=186)
- Visit the restaurant at off-peak hour
- Interviewer asks to see all single-use containers in use
- Records the container type and material
- Also records the physical characteristics of the restaurant (to classify later – sit-down restaurant, fast food, carry-out)

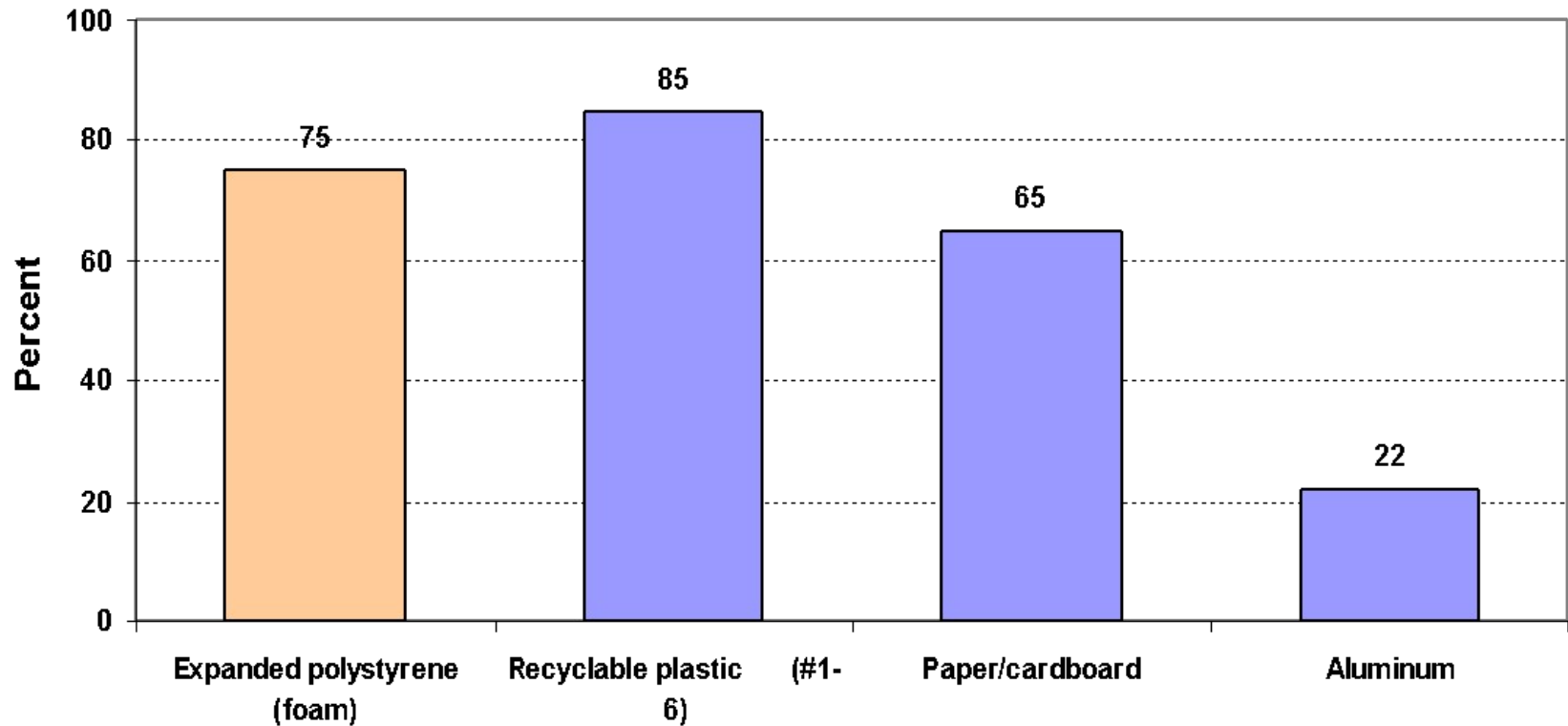
Three-quarters of food service establishments had foam containers before the ban...

(Random sample of 186 food service establishments in Prince George's County)



...but most were using other container types as well

Prince George's County (n=186 establishments)



2. Shopper Surveys

Objectives

- Document shoppers' shopping bag choices, establish a baseline
- Track changes over time
- Assess the effectiveness of the Montgomery County bag tax

Sample & Methodology

2019 Survey of Shoppers' Bag Choices at Grocery Stores in Prince George's County

STORE NO. EXIT #: OF

Store:

Address:

Date: START TIME: AM PM END TIME: AM PM

Enumerator:

(1) Are paper bags available at checkout?

(2) Are reusable bags for sale at checkout?

Number of shoppers with...

Only reusable bags:	<input type="text"/>
Mix of reusable and paper or plastic:	<input type="text"/>
Only plastic bags:	<input type="text"/>
Only paper bags:	<input type="text"/>
Mix of paper and plastic bags:	<input type="text"/>
Merchandise w/no bag:	<input type="text"/>

Note: Do not attempt to count the number of bags! Do not approach the shoppers or attempt to engage them.

- Adult weekend shoppers' bag choices observed as they exit the grocery store
- All 48 stores from 7 chains included: Food Lion, Giant, Harris Teeter, Safeway, Shoppers, Wegmans, Weis
- Enumerators discreetly observe exiting shoppers for one hour at each store exit and record bag choice category
- They also note presence of paper and reusable bags at the checkout



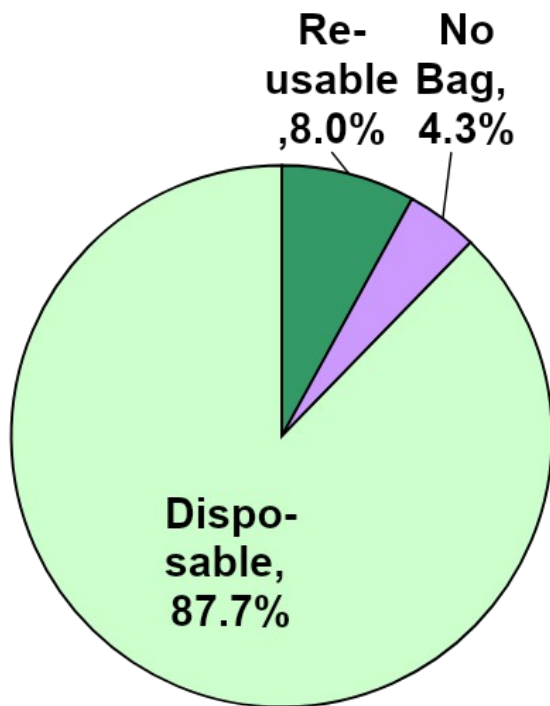
Strengths

- We record what shoppers actually do, not what they say they do!
- Large sample size yields precise estimates
- Easy to administer, can be done with volunteers, quickly, doesn't require contact with shoppers
- Tracks behavior of a well-defined population of shoppers across jurisdictions and over time

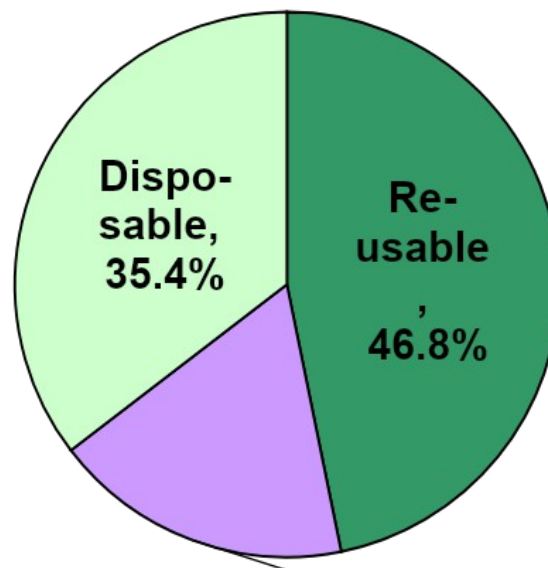
Limitations

- Can't quantify the number of bags used
- Re-usable bag use is underestimated to extent that shoppers use back-packs, purses, briefcases
- Not representative of the average shopper, strictly the sentinel population of weekend grocery shoppers
- In Montgomery County, can't tell whether shoppers have actually been charged for their bags

In 2014, the Shopper Survey demonstrated the impact of a 5-cent bag fee

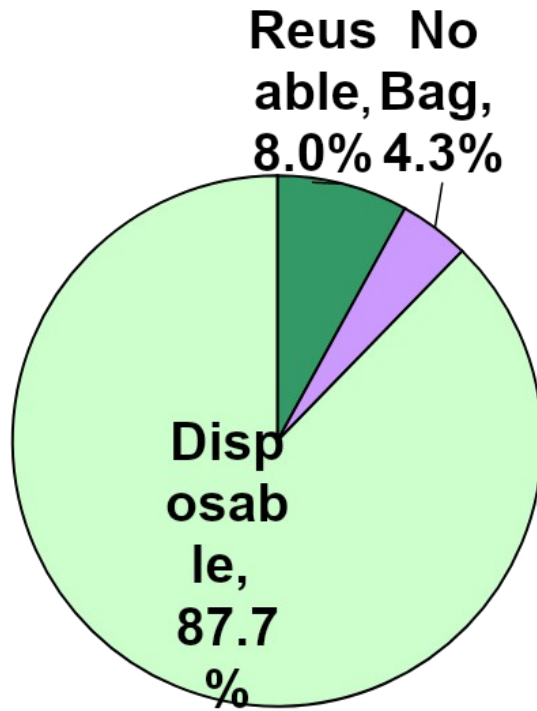


**Prince
George's
County**

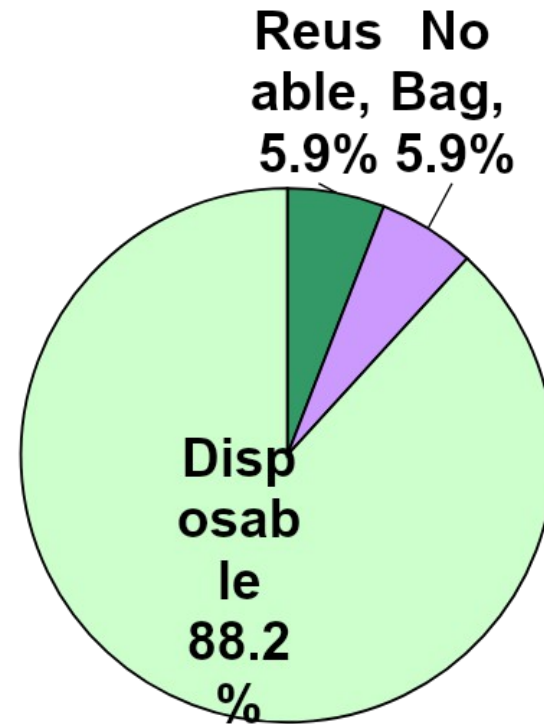


Montgomery County, 2014
(9,121 shoppers)

Since then, there's been no progress in reusable bag use in Prince George's County!



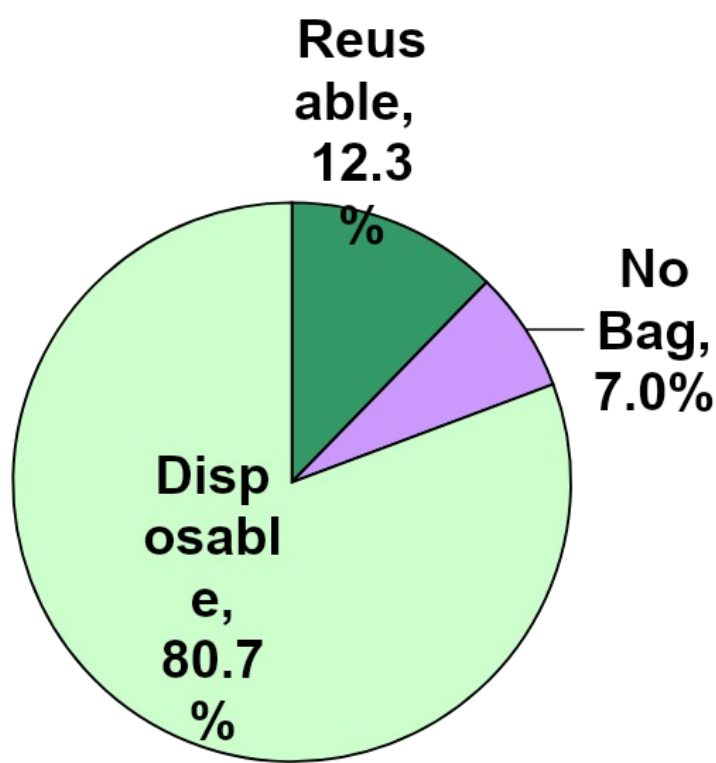
Prince George's



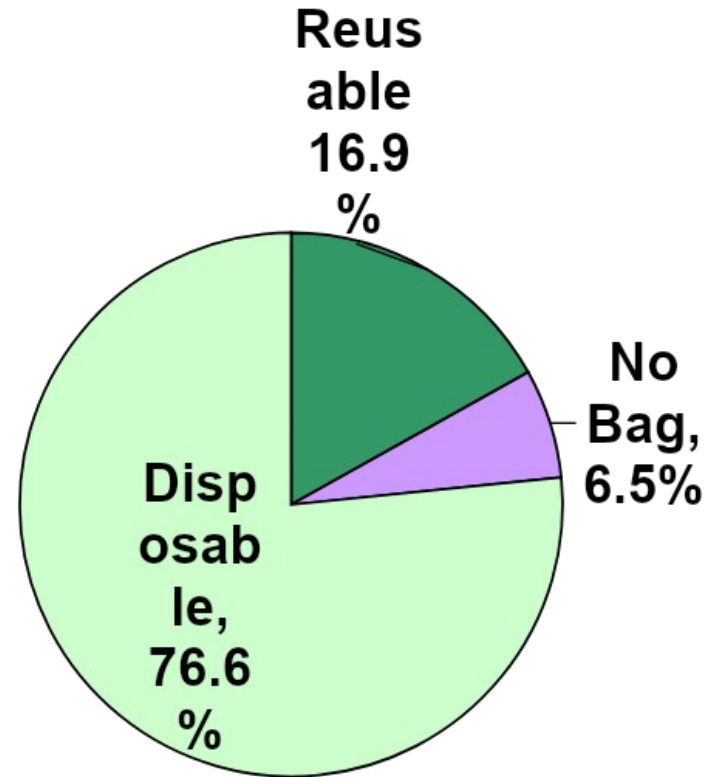
Prince George's County, 2019

(7,604 shoppers)

More than three-quarters of shoppers in Frederick and Howard Counties are using plastic bags



Frederick
County,
2019



Howard
County,
2019

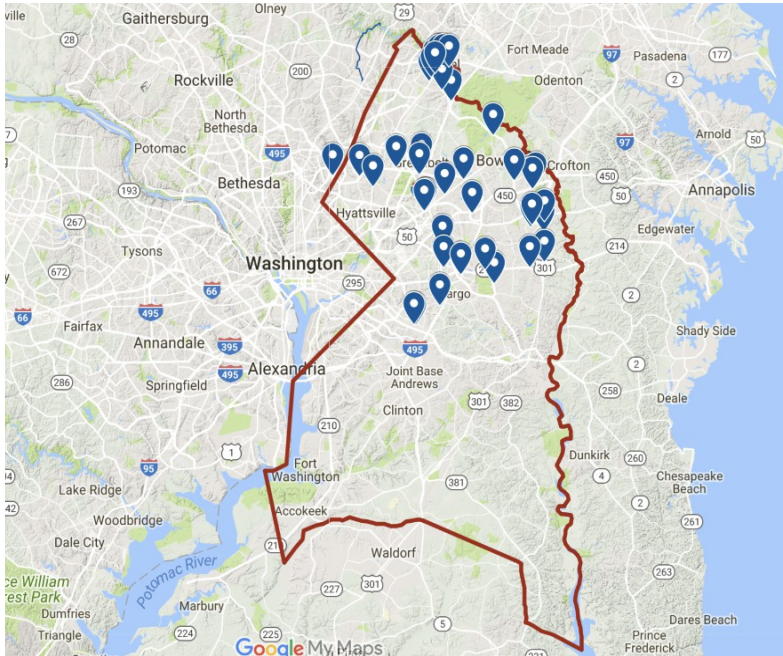
Feedback from volunteers

3. Monitoring compliance with the foam ban

Objective

- Educate businesses (restaurants, retail) about the foam ban and how to comply
- Measure the compliance rate
- Measure improvement in compliance after the education intervention

Sample and Methodology



Coverage to date: 465 businesses in 45 Shopping centers in Prince George's

- Businesses in shopping centers near volunteers
- All businesses in the shopping center are listed (restaurants, retailers, pharmacies, theaters, gas stations, hotels, shipping centers)
- Educational materials from the County
- Presence of foam containers recorded
- Infractions not reported
- Return visit to those with foam 6 months later

Monitoring Sheet & Educational Material

Sierra Club Foam Ban Monitoring 2017



Prince George's County, MD

Name and location of Shopping Center: _____

Municipality: _____

Enumerator: _____

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
		TYPE 1=restnt 2=fast fd 3=carry out 4=retail 5=theater 7=parcel 8=gas stn 9=hotel 10=pharm 6=other	1= chain 2= independent	Date	Heard of ban?	If YES, how? (list all mentioned) 1=newspaper/media 2=county letter/card 3=corporate HQ 4=my manager 5=customers 7=inspector 8=Rest. Depot 9=Sierra Club 6=other (explain)	Is your business currently providing or selling any foam containers?	If YES, what types?	Questions/comments of manager (record email if they want more info)	Comments of interviewer
No.	Name of business	Address (may be unit #)								
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										




IT'S THE LAW



Starting July 1, 2016, polystyrene (commonly referred to as Styrofoam™), polystyrene loose fill packaging (also known as "packing peanuts") and other foam articles are not permitted for sale or use in Prince George's County.

WHY THE BAN?

To reduce the amount of polystyrene waste entering the landfill and littering our roadways, neighborhoods and local waterways, the County is requiring the use of non-foam food packaging products that are environmentally-friendly.

WHICH BUSINESSES ARE AFFECTED? (including but not limited to the following)

- Full and limited-service restaurants
- Supermarkets and grocery stores
- Fast food restaurants
- Food carts or trucks
- Cafés and delicatessens
- Cafeterias
- Pack and ship stores
- Coffee shops
- Retailers and wholesalers selling disposable dishware, storage containers, packing materials and polystyrene products
- Convenience stores
- Discount stores

WHAT CAN BE USED OR SOLD?

There are many non-foam food packaging alternatives. Some examples include recyclable and compostable containers that are rigid plastic or paper-based. Visit environment.mypgc.us/foamfree to view a list of vendors that offer comparable products or contact CountyClick at 3-1-1.

EXAMPLES OF SINGLE-USE FOAM PACKAGING THAT CANNOT BE SOLD OR USED * visit environment.mypgc.us/foamfree for exemption information



Food Containers



Plates



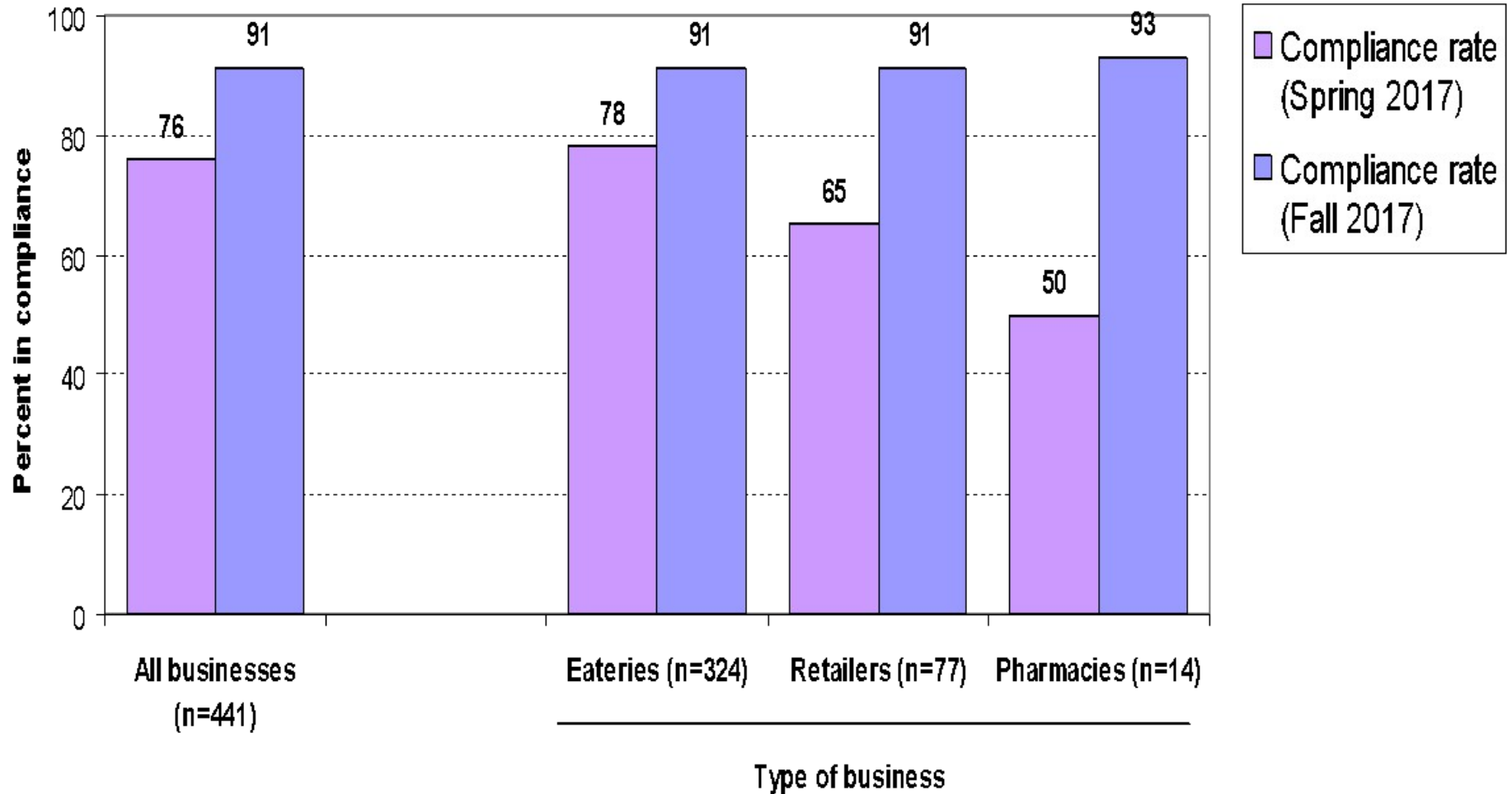
Hot and Cold Beverage Cups

Please visit environment.mypgc.us/foamfree for more information

#foamfreeinpgc   

Foam monitor

Compliance with the foam ban increased to >90% after face-to-face visits by Sierra Club volunteers



Lessons – Foam Ban

- A well-planned, executed, and sustained education campaign is essential for rollout to businesses
- Letters with DOE return address are more likely to reach the owner than a flyer
- Businesses are very appreciative of the information
- When owners/managers are informed of the ban and the reason, they willingly comply
- Very satisfying to the volunteers

Opportunities!

- **Join the zero waste team at:**
www.sierraclub.org/Maryland/zero-waste
- **Volunteer to help with an ongoing or planned shopper survey!**
 - Montgomery County (Sunday afternoon)
 - Surveys in AA, Baltimore City, other counties
- **Volunteer to educate businesses for the rollout of the state-wide foam ban!**
 - Martha.Ainsworth@mdsierra.org