

Carve Their Names with Shame



At its February 10 meeting, the San Luis Obispo County Integrated Waste Management Authority could have moved forward with implementing the long-delayed Ordinance No. 2019-1, regulating polystyrene and expanded polystyrene (EPS) food containers and products. The new target date was April 2021. By that time, local merchants would have had a year and a half to adapt to the ordinance.

Instead, the IWMA, comprised of representatives from the county board of supervisors and all city governments, asked staff to draft a new ordinance repealing the ban. The first reading of the repeal ordinance is on March 10, and a public hearing is scheduled for April 14.

The destructive effects of polystyrene and EPS on our environment, the primary reasons for the ordinance, had not changed since it was adopted in 2019. These materials are lightweight, long-lasting, and litter our parks, streets, waterways, and ocean. They still don't biodegrade and are not recyclable.

Staff recommended rescinding the polystyrene ordinance because of anticipated state-level legislation and a recent SLO County Board of Supervisors' directive to IWMA to enforce only State mandates. They also expressed concern that implementing a new state law mandating reduction of organic waste in landfills will be very demanding and they cannot simultaneously implement a polystyrene ban.

None of these reasons holds water when compared to the damage these products do to our environment:

● Whether or not legislation is introduced in Sacramento, there is no guarantee that it will become law. Bills designed to curb the proliferation of single-use plastics have been introduced at every legislative session for the last three years. All have died at the hands of the plastics lobby.

● The organic waste bill passed in 2016. The polystyrene ordinance passed in 2019. IWMA had plenty of time to include the costs and time of implementing both into their budget and staffing. Their staff can walk and chew gum at the same time.

● With regard to the recent “state mandates” direction from the SLO County Board of Supervisors, we directed the IWMA’s attention to the Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989, as cited in Ordinance 2019-1. It empowers local waste management agencies to “promote the following waste management practices in order of priority: 1) source reduction; 2) recycling and composting; and 3) environmentally safe transformation and environmentally safe land disposal, at the discretion of the city or county.”

The IWMA had all the mandate it needed to remove polystyrene and EPS from the waste stream by prohibiting it at the source.

IWMA did the right thing in 2019 when it passed Ordinance No. 2019-1.

Then it delayed the right thing.

Now it’s throwing the right thing off a cliff.

The final vote to repeal the polystyrene ordinance will be held at the April 14 board meeting of the IWMA.

Here are the IWMA directors who asked for a repeal of the of the polystyrene ban before it can go into effect (aptly dubbed “a gang of bullies” by The Tribune):

Debbie Arnold – County BOS
Lynne Compton – County BOS
John Peschong – County BOS
John Hamon – Paso Robles City Council
Charles Bourbeau – Atascadero City Council
Scott Newton – Pismo Beach City Council
Robert Enns – Cayucos Sanitary District

Remember their names and what they are doing to the Central Coast of California when they run for reelection to their local seat or the board of supervisors.