

A Plastic Kind of Love

A major environmental pollutant that increasingly finds itself jilted all over California continues to nestle in the loving arms of San Luis Obispo County, thanks to our more conservative elected officials.

Those folks long delayed the SLO County Integrated Waste Management Authority's ban on polystyrene – the family of

non-recycled plastics that includes Styrofoam – then tried to kill the ban outright, and when they couldn't do that, took steps to leave the IWMA in order to ensure that the ban would not be enforced in areas within County jurisdiction.

By way of contrast, on April 19, Los Angeles County passed an ordinance to reduce plastic waste from restaurants and food facilities in its unincorporated area. Beginning in May 2023, the ordinance will require single-use foodware, including utensils, takeout containers, and cups, to be compostable or recyclable; ban expanded polystyrene products; and require reusable foodware at full-service, dine-in eateries.

Billions of pounds of plastic waste enter the marine environment every year, and the current amount is projected to triple within the next twenty years.

It is worth revisiting the primary rationale for conservative opposition to the SLO County ban, as often stated by Supervisors Debbie Arnold, Lynn Compton, and John Peschong: The IWMA must only enforce state mandates.

But in fact, the IWMA's ordinances are all about enforcing the state mandate that no less than 75 percent of solid waste generated be source-reduced, recycled, or composted. That mandate, provided in the Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989, is cited in the first paragraph of the IWMA's polystyrene ordinance. It's also in the IWMA's 2012 ordinance prohibiting single-use plastic bags, which noted that the IWMA is "empowered ... to achieve the mandates imposed by the Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989 on a regional basis," enabling it "to enact a waste reduction and reuse program that will decrease the use of single-use carryout bags." Ditto your Styrofoam take-out clamshell.

