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Environmental Organizations Condemn TCEQ's Withdrawal of Ban on Plastic Pollution

Sierra Club and others urge agency to correct massive misstep on water protections

Austin, TX – After proposing a first-ever ban on plastic pollution and receiving more than 500 public comments in support, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has withdrawn its own proposal in a move that aligns the agency even closer with industry special interests. The Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter and partner organizations will testify at the TCEQ meeting tomorrow, Sept. 7, at 9 a.m. to condemn this blatant ignoring of the Texans and the environment that TCEQ is mandated to protect and to urge the agency to reinstate the ban.

Last March, TCEQ released its proposed updates to the Surface Water Quality Standards, a set of regulations that decide how much pollution to allow in our rivers, streams, lakes and estuaries. The agency had for the first time included protections against pre-production plastic pollution — often called “nurdles” — that can wreak havoc on wildlife by breaking down into harmful chemicals in addition to transporting toxic materials. TCEQ’s proposed standard was weaker than what advocates wanted to see because it would have allowed producers to simply claim “infeasibility” of minimizing pollution and did not address microplastics that aren’t visible to the naked eye. Absent any standard, Sierra Club and partners acknowledged it was a first step, and *more than 500* members of the public also voiced their support. Meanwhile TCEQ received *five* comments against the ban from wealthy corporations like Dow Chemical Company. When TCEQ released its latest round of revisions to the SWQS on Aug. 19, the microplastic ban had disappeared.

“We are beyond frustrated by TCEQ’s decision,” said **Alex Ortiz, Water Resources Specialist with the Sierra Club**. “Texans around the state supported this much-needed standard, and the agency itself was the one to propose it. Any argument by industry that TCEQ doesn’t have the statutory authority to do so is baseless, and the agency knows it.”

“Banning nurdle pollution would have helped protect Texas frontline communities, as well as wildlife and inland and coastal waters around the state,” said **Mashal Awais, Bayou City**

Waterkeeper's Community Science Manager. “The current proposal will have a negative impact on both human and environmental health.”

Kristen Schlemmer, Bayou City Waterkeeper’s Legal Director, added, “This disregard for public input in favor of siding with corporations is especially outrageous considering that TCEQ’s Sunset Review just found that the agency lacks transparency and must do more to earn the trust of the people.”

Because TCEQ can still further revise the SWQS before finalizing and sending them to the EPA for approval, Sierra Club and Bayou City Waterkeeper will urge the agency on Sept. 7 to correct its massive misstep.

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