

MEETING NOTES
SINGLE USE BAG REDUCTION AND RECYCLING PROGRAM

Working Group Meeting

Wednesday, October 21, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

Department of Public Works, Annex Building 1st Floor Conference Room

I. Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. Mr. Coby Skye of Public Works welcomed the Working Group, and introductions were made among attendees and phone participants.

Those in attendance included: Coby Skye, Nilda Gemeniano, Luke Mitchell, Angélica SantaMaría, Natalie Jimenez, and Rogelio Gamiño with County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works. Those who attended via conference call were: Diana Gomez with City of Los Angeles, Pat Smith with Earth Share California, Rick Crandall with Albertsons, and Barbara Janeway with Ralphs.

II. News and Updates

a) Recent Articles

Mr. Mitchell reported on some of the recent news and articles relating to single use bags:

- The Surfrider Foundation has appealed to the City Council of Ocean City, New Jersey, to ban plastic bags across the island. Plastic bags are commonly seen in local marshes, bays, and in the ocean.
- “Save The Bay” organization has released a report estimating that nearly 1 million bags end up in the San Francisco Bay each year, clogging wetlands, strangling wildlife, and harming water quality. They also found that the average use time for plastic bags is 12 minutes.
- The Caribbean island of Nevis is promoting the use of reusable bags by imposing a fee on plastic bags and giving away reusable bags. Nevis currently uses about 500 plastic bags per person per year.

b) Legislative Updates

Mr. Rogelio Gamiño provided an update on legislation. The regular legislative session ended on October 11, 2009 with no legislation relating to plastic bags advancing to the Governor’s desk for consideration. The regular legislative session will resume after the holiday season on January 4, 2010. Some of the bills that are being monitored will be reactivated.

c) Environmental Impact Report Update

Mr. Skye updated the Working Group on the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) being prepared for the ordinance requested by the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. The County's consultant, Sapphos Environmental, Inc., is currently developing the Initial Study, which will be circulated for public comment in the next few weeks. Public scoping meetings are tentatively scheduled to be held in November. Further information on the scoping meetings will be made available on the website and to Program stakeholders. Mr. Skye invited all stakeholders to participate and comment on the Initial Study. As a public document, residents, businesses, cities, and other agencies are invited to participate at the scoping meetings.

III. Public Education Campaign

a) Reusable Bags

Staff has ordered the reusable bags through two campaign partners: One Bag at a Time and Earthwise Bags. Staff will distribute reusable bags at participating supermarkets throughout the County. Ms. Jimenez also reported that campaign partnerships include Heal the Bay, Earth Share of California, 710 ESPN, 107.5 KLOVE, 101.9 La Nueva, Albertsons, Ralphs/Food4Less, Top Valu/Valu Plus, and HOWS Market. Over 60,000 reusable bags will be ready for distribution during the campaign, which begins on November 15, Keep America Beautiful and the National Recycling Coalition's "America Recycles Day" and ends on December 17, Heal the Bay's "Day Without A Bag".

b) Cities Participation

Ms. Jimenez informed the Working Group that city participation included over 50 cities that were willing to partner and promote the Brag About Your Bag[®] promotional campaign within their cities.

c) Community Outreach

Ms. Jimenez also informed participants of the upcoming press conference that will take place on Tuesday, November 10 with celebrity NBA spokesperson Luke Walton and other guest celebrities. Invitations will be sent out within the next week, and further event details will be posted on the website. The campaign launch event will be held at the County Mall on 500 West Temple Street, which will also include an environmental fair.

IV. Update on Expanded Polystyrene Efforts

Mr. Skye provided an update on efforts to reduce expanded polystyrene (EPS) food container use in the County. Staff anticipates presenting recommendations at an upcoming County Board of Supervisors meeting. Once the Board considers the item, staff will formally expand the focus of the Working Group to incorporate outreach efforts for EPS reduction.

The County retained a consultant, Responsible Purchasing Network (RPN), which conducted life cycle analyses with regard to alternatives to expanded polystyrene food containers. Comments were solicited for the draft documents developed by RPN (Final Report, Life Cycle Analysis, and Food Container Purchasing Guide), and comments were received from the plastics industry and environmental groups. Comments highlighted typical end-of-life disposal of food containers at landfills. They noted that the life cycle assessment of greenhouse gas emissions showed that EPS products may have the lowest impact if food containers were disposed in landfills. There is the possible additional cost for the County to develop the infrastructure for composting and/or recycling countywide, and that changes in the makeup of the litter stream would not reduce the amount of litter.

Comments made by environmental groups noted that viewing the broader environmental impacts, in addition to the GHG life cycle assessment, and considering litter impact, community blight, wildlife and the ecology, EPS products continue to have the most significant negative environmental impact. They also pointed to studies on the toxicity of EPS as it breaks down and the impact that it continues to have on the natural environment as it photodegrades and releases toxins. Since EPS is made from petroleum, it remains in the environment longer than alternatives. They noted that shifting to alternative products along with public education would actually reduce overall litter and lead to other potential environmental benefits.

Comments were reviewed and some were incorporated into RPN's documents. The following is a brief summary that staff anticipates submitting to the Board as recommendations:

- 1) Implement a restriction on the purchasing by County operations, County facilities, offices, concessions, permitted events, and sponsored events. Waivers for specific reasons will be considered by the Energy and Environmental Team (E/ET).
- 2) Encourage the collection and recycling of EPS by those departments that are not easily able to switch, such as the Sheriff's Department.
- 3) Have semiannual reports submitted by the E/ET for a three year period, tracking the progress of the program.
- 4) Have the E/ET educate Departments, County employees and residents/customers about the policy and alternative products.
- 5) Directing departments, in consultation with the County Internal Services Department, to modify future purchasing agreements to incorporate alternatives into the contracts.

Staff will update stakeholders through the electronic notification system once the meeting date is set.

V. Next Steps

We will keep stakeholders posted on the Brag about your Bag[®] campaign.