

INSIDE SOLID WASTE



Los Angeles County prohibits expanded polystyrene containers at County facilities

In yet another environmentally-positive move, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has adopted a policy prohibiting the purchase and use of expanded polystyrene (EPS), commonly known as styrofoam, food containers at County facilities, offices, concessions, and by commercial food and beverage suppliers at County-permitted events and County-sponsored events.

The Board's action on September 21, 2010, followed recommendations contained in a study conducted by Public Works and the Responsible Purchasing Network (RPN) that outlined ways to cut the County's carbon footprint and reduce litter. The study recommended the County replace EPS food containers with reusable containers where practicable and recyclable and/or compostable items in all other instances.

The litter includes a disproportionate number of EPS food containers that are typically white, highly visible and highly buoyant. The containers are often seen floating in gutters, rivers and creeks following rain events.

RPN surveyed County departments on their consumption of EPS containers, conducted lifecycle assessments that compared environmental impacts of EPS and other products, and identified practical, environmentally preferable alternatives to EPS products.

The study found that various County operations spend over half a million dollars on at least 16 million EPS food containers annually. Based on these findings, RPN specifically recommended that the County and its contractors:

- Discontinue the purchase and use of EPS food containers at all County operations.
- Use reusable food containers when feasible
- When reusables are not feasible, use food containers that can be recycled or composted.

RPN identified a host of food container options made from renewable resources like bagasse and other agricultural waste products, corn-based

polylactide plastics, paper, and other materials. The Board elected to make County offices the first to act in order to demonstrate leadership on this sensitive issue. It is estimated that successful implementation of the internal policy alone would eliminate over 80 Olympic-size swimming pools of polystyrene trash every year.

The Board also directed the Director of Public Works and County Counsel to report back within a year of implementing the prohibition on EPS at County operations, on the feasibility of implementing a restriction on the use of EPS food containers at food service establishments and retail stores in the County unincorporated areas. For more information on County EPS reduction efforts, contact Suk Chong at (626) 458-5167 or schong@dpw.lacounty.gov.