

Demonstrations

Group protests fast-food use of Styrofoam

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SANTA CRUZ — About 20 demonstrators gathered outside the McDonald's on Mission Street Saturday to call attention to the fast food restaurant's use of Styrofoam packaging.

The protesters carried signs with slogans such as "Is a Warm Burger Worth a Dead Planet?" and "Honk if You Hate Styrofoam" as part of a nationwide "McToxics Campaign" organized by a Virginia consumers group.

The back side of the signs carried messages about Bank of America and Burger King, used at earlier ecology demonstrations.

"We recycle our picket signs — after all, they're only paper," said group spokesman Nehemiah Barshlomo.

Styrofoam has come under fire by environmental groups because it uses fluorocarbon gas, the same gas thought to damage the Earth's ozone layer.

It also is impossible to recycle, non-biodegradable and releases toxic fumes when burned, according to Barshlomo.

"This is an educational demonstration to let the public know about the dangers of Styrofoam," he said.

McDonald's was targeted because it is the largest fast-food restaurant in the world, Barshlomo said.

The company has said it is working to phase out the use of fluorocarbon gas in making Styrofoam, said corporate spokeswoman Alana Ehram in a phone interview from Oak Brook, Ill. McDonald's hopes to replace fluorocarbon gas with another chemical within 18 months.

But the replacement gas is also toxic, Barshlomo said.

"We're hoping to nudge McDonald's into becoming good corporate neighbors by using cardboard wrappers or wax paper," he said.

Many of the demonstrators belonged to Earth First!, an environmental activist group whose motto is "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth."

The Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous waste in Arlington, Va., is staging nationwide protests all week against Styrofoam food packaging. The local chapter of Earth First! coordinated the Santa Cruz action, Barshlomo said.

Local Earth Firsters hope Santa Cruz will one day follow the example of Berkeley, where the City Council recently voted to ban all Styrofoam food packing starting Jan. 1.

The protest had an opposite effect on business than had been expected. A manager at the Mission Street McDonald's said several patrons came in because they saw the signs and wanted to see what it was all about. "We ended up doing more business than we had expected today," the manager said.