
Local

VCF Environment RP

Patton urging countywide styrofoam ban

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The plastic foam cups that currently insulate against hot liquids will be banned in all unincorporated portions of Santa Cruz County under a proposal by Supervisor Gary Patton, as would all other polystyrene foam food packaging.

In a March 16 letter, Patton has asked his fellow supervisors to join him in requesting that a new ordinance be drawn up that would ban plastic foam food packaging at fast-food outlets. The matter would then be subject to a public hearing May 23, before the board voted on whether or not to approve the ban.

The ban would cover such items as plastic foam cups, "clamshell" boxes for hamburgers, and the like.

The supervisors have already banned the use of plastic foam food containers in two county cafeterias. Patton noted in his letter that the Seaside Co., which operates concessions at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, has also vowed to avoid plastic foam packaging where possible.

Patton said he had been urged toward the proposal for a total county ban by the California Public Interest Research Group.

Plastic foam packaging has increasingly become the target of bans in various U.S. cities and counties. It is non-biodegradable, meaning it takes up inordinate space in garbage dumps, which are fast filling up, and does not break down. The manufacture of some varieties of plastic foam also causes the release of chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere. CFCs are known to damage Earth's ozone layer, which screens out harmful ultraviolet sunlight.

The proposed ban would leave plastic foam food packaging legal in the county's four cities, which would have to institute their own municipal bans to prohibit its use.

The ban also would not affect plastic foam packaging around breakable non-food items, such as medicines, electronic equipment, china, and the like, and would not apply to retail food stores.

—Katharine Ball