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California OPC Proposes Ban on Polystyrene Food Containers, Fees for Plastic Bag Use
Recommendation Advances Council's Statewide Strategy to Reduce Ocean Litter

Sacramento – The California Ocean Protection Council (OPC) today proposed banning polystyrene take-out containers and plastic bag use fees as part of a strategy to reduce ocean litter. Following the OPC's historic resolution last year to eliminate marine debris, the strategy includes public comments gathered during the last three months and calls for plastic manufacturers to recover and dispose of their products and for product user fees to be assessed.

“The council is confident that this strategy will have far reaching benefit for ocean health and brings about needed action to tackle the marine debris problems plaguing our oceans,” said OPC Chair and Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman. “Our decision today moves California closer to a real solution to reduce the threats to our ocean and coast.”

The proposed implementation strategy, that will require legislative action in order to be enacted, identifies three primary approaches that California should take to eliminate marine debris. California should: (1) establish a “take-back” program that would require manufacturers to take back used packaging and dispose of it properly; (2) institute a statewide fee on single-use plastic grocery bags and a prohibition on polystyrene food containers; and (3) impose user fees on other commonly littered packaging items.

The council noted that economic impacts should be considered as a ban on polystyrene containers is developed and language to this effect was added to the adopted plan.

Today's adopted strategy reflects public comments that were taken on an OPC staff draft plan to reduce ocean litter. Perhaps the most notable change, the plan no longer proposes a statewide ban on plastic bags, but instead suggests a phased approach that would imposed a fee on plastic bag use. The strategy suggests that if the fee is not successful in substantially reducing the use of plastic bags then a prohibition should be implemented.

Full and partial polystyrene food container prohibitions have been implemented in many California cities including: Alameda, Aliso Viejo, Berkeley, Calabasas, Capitola, Carmel, Emeryville, Fairfax, Hercules, Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Laguna Woods, Los Angeles, Malibu, Millbrae, Oakland, Pacific Grove, Pittsburg, San Clemente, San Francisco, San Juan Capistrano, Santa Cruz, Santa Monica, Scotts Valley and West Hollywood.

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OPC Ocean Litter 2.

California communities are not alone in recognizing plastic bags as a significant threat to the marine environment. Several states, including Alaska, Massachusetts, New York, and Washington are considering plastic bag prohibitions. China, Australia, South Africa, Bangladesh, Tanzania, and several other countries recently banned plastic grocery bags. In 2002, Ireland imposed a tax on the distribution of plastic grocery bags that resulted in a 95 percent drop in plastic bag use since the tax was implemented. Whole Foods Market recently stopped offering plastic bags in its nearly 300 stores.

The counties of Ventura, San Mateo and Sonoma have also imposed some kind of prohibition as have the cities of Rahway, N.J., Portland, Ore., and Freeport, Maine and Suffolk County, N.Y. For a copy of the implementation strategy adopted today visit <http://www.resources.ca.gov/copc/>.

According to the Long Beach-based Algalita Marine Research Foundation, 60 to 80 percent of the world's ocean litter is made up of plastic. In some areas, 90 to 95 percent of the marine debris is plastic. State and local governments spend millions of dollars every year on ocean litter cleanup. In fiscal year 2006, Caltrans spent \$55 million to remove litter and debris from roadsides and highways. Uncollected, most of this will ultimately drain into the ocean. Marine debris also negatively impacts California's \$46 billion tourism-based ocean-dependent economy. Despite an ongoing effort for decades to reduce ocean litter, the proliferation of plastic debris has increased exponentially.

On Feb. 8, 2007, the OPC passed a marine debris resolution (linked below) that identified 13 recommendations for reducing and preventing ocean litter. The council noted that this litter, commonly known as marine debris, harms hundreds of marine species, from birds that eat small pieces of debris and feed it to their young, to marine mammals that get entangled in larger pieces.

To view the OPC's Feb. 8, 2007 marine debris resolution visit http://www.resources.ca.gov/copc/02-08-07_meeting/Adopted_Marine_Debris_Res_0207.pdf