



## County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

### Agenda Item Submittal

**From:** Board of Supervisors: Third District  
(831) 454-2200

**Subject:** Plastic Pollution Mitigation in Santa Cruz County

**Meeting Date:** February 26, 2019

### Recommended Actions:

- 1) BOTTLED WATER
  - a) Direct DPW staff to research a policy prohibiting the use of County funds to purchase bottled water for County-sponsored meetings and events, and
  - b) Direct DPW staff to research additional options for reducing the use of plastic water bottles in the unincorporated areas of the County;
- 2) PLASTIC FOOD SERVICE WARE  
Direct DPW staff to explore prohibiting entities in the unincorporated area from providing customers with plastic to-go food service war;
- 3) TOBACCO WASTE  
Direct DPW staff to research the issue of plastic pollution due to tobacco waste with an emphasis on improperly discarded cigarette butts including researching the feasibility of an extended producer responsibility approach;
- 4) OTHER PLASTIC POLLUTION  
Direct DPW staff to research additional plastic pollution issues which might be addressed through local measures; and
- 5) Direct DPW staff to consult the Santa Cruz County Commission on the Environment and the Integrated Waste Management Local Task Force and return to the Board with a proposed ordinance or ordinances in May 2019.

### Executive Summary

Plastic pollution is a grave environmental issue, both on land and in the ocean. Santa Cruz County has adopted policies to limit certain single-use plastics from our environment and it is important to take additional steps in order to better protect our environment from plastic pollution. We propose that County of Santa Cruz Department of Public Works (DPW) staff research a policy prohibiting the use of County funds to purchase bottled water for County-sponsored meetings and events and for additional measures to reduce the use of plastic water bottles in our community. In addition, in an effort to reduce the amount of plastic produced, distributed and discarded, we

recommend that DPW explore prohibiting entities in the unincorporated area from providing customers with plastic to-go food service ware and to return to the Board with a recommendation. Tobacco waste, especially plastic cigarette butts, are among our most pervasive litter problems. We propose that DPW explore measures for addressing the problem of tobacco waste and return to the Board with a recommendation. The environmental community has expressed concern about a range of additional plastic pollution problems. We recommend that DPW explore additional plastic pollution reduction measures and return to the Board with a recommendation. We further recommend that DPW consult the Santa Cruz County Commission on the Environment and the Integrated Waste Management Local Task Force and return to the Board with a proposed ordinance or ordinances to address plastic pollution.

## **Background and Analysis**

Plastic pollution is a threat to the health of our planet. From poisoning and injuring marine life to disrupting human hormones, from littering our beaches and landscapes to clogging our waste streams and landfills, the exponential growth of plastics is an enormous problem.

The Santa Cruz County community has taken many steps to protect our environment. The County has enacted a series of laws to protect the environment and local tourism economy, including banning polystyrene to-go food containers, banning the sale of expanded polystyrene ("Styrofoam") plastics altogether, prohibiting disposable single-use carryout plastic bags, assuring that all cups and to-go cutlery are certified compostable or recyclable and prohibiting plastics stir-sticks and straws. Our Board recently took action to prohibit single-use bathroom products in the local hospitality industry by 2021. Many of these County actions have led to other local and even statewide changes, yet there is even more we can do to address plastic pollution.

50 billion plastic water bottles are used in the United States every year, and less than a quarter are recycled. With the turmoil in the recycling market, the number that are recycled is going down. Even though we pay a deposit on each bottle, there are few places to redeem them. As a first step toward reducing the prevalence of plastic water bottles in our community, the County should consider prohibiting the use of County funds to purchase bottled water for County-sponsored meetings and events.

In an effort to reduce the amount of plastic produced, distributed and discarded, we recommend that the Department of Public Works explore prohibiting entities in the unincorporated area from providing customers with plastic to-go food service ware. Santa Cruz County already requires all to-go food service ware provided to customers in the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County to be recyclable or compostable, but given the challenged state of the recycling market, it makes sense to attempt to reduce the use of recyclable plastic to-go food service ware.

Tobacco waste, especially plastic cigarette butts, are among our most pervasive litter problems, clogging storm drains, littering our parks and beaches, and endangering the health of our wildlife. County staff should explore measures for addressing the problem of tobacco waste and return to the Board with a recommendation.

**Strategic Plan Element(s)**

This item addresses the focus area of Sustainable Environment, working toward the goals of protecting Natural Resources (B), Local Conservation (C) and Climate Change (D).

**Submitted by:**

Ryan Coonerty, Third District Supervisor, John Leopold, First District Supervisor

**Attachments:**

- a Letter of Katherine O'Dea, Support for Plastic Pollution Mitigation