

May 6, 2011

Mayor Jerry Sanders  
San Diego City Hall  
202 C St.  
San Diego, CA 92101

**RE: Request for Executive Policy Restricting Bottled Water and Plastic Foam at City Facilities and Permitted Events**

Dear Mayor Sanders:

San Diego Coastkeeper, the region's largest environmental organization working on inland and coastal water issues, and the undersigned organizations urge you to adopt an executive policy restricting purchases of bottled water and expanded polystyrene (EPS, or plastic foam) products at City of San Diego facilities and permitted events. Such an executive policy would save the City money by limiting bottled water purchases, benefit our environment by reducing the amount of plastic litter in the City, and boost tourism by beautifying our beaches through reduced plastic trash on our beaches and in our waterways.

**Plastic Bottles and Plastic Foam are a Problem in San Diego.**

Plastic bottles and plastic foam contribute to our prevalent litter problem in our waterways and ocean. In 2010, San Diego Coastkeeper and Surfrider Foundation volunteers collected over 200 plastic bottles, 8,000 plastic bottle caps and 25,000 pieces of plastic foam from San Diego County beaches. Plastic foam is a particularly vexing problem because it is lightweight, floats and easily breaks into small pieces making it a challenge for removal from storm drains and the environment. Stepping up plastic foam recycling efforts is not the answer, either, because plastic foam cannot be recycled once it is contaminated with food. Furthermore, both plastic bottles and plastic foam are made from petroleum; our continued use of these products bolsters the country's dependence on foreign oil.

**An Executive Policy Can Restrict Plastic Bottles and Plastic foam at City Facilities and Permitted Events.**

San Diego Coastkeeper first proposed restricting bottled water and plastic foam at City facilities and events to ex-City Councilmember Donna Frye in a meeting in late 2009. Interested in the proposal, she ordered a memo from the City Attorney's office to address any legal issues with regulating these pollutants in City facilities and events. The City Attorney's office presented the memo to the Natural Resources and Culture (NR & C) Committee of the City Council in November 2010 indicating that there are no major legal hurdles to an executive policy restricting plastic bottles and plastic foam at City facilities and events. In response, the NR&C asked the Mayor's office to act upon

this analysis and provide a report with further analysis of the benefits of such a move. The report is scheduled to be presented at the May 18 NR&C meeting. Numerous members of the City Council, including Council President Young and Councilmembers Gloria, Alvarez, Faulconer, and Lightner have expressed strong support for an administrative regulation addressing this problem.

The Mayor's office and San Diego Coastkeeper have been working with staff at the Environmental Services Department to make recommendations for an executive policy on plastic foam and bottles. We support Environmental Services Staff's recommendations on restrictions on bottled water and plastic foam purchases, especially the extension of the plastic foam policy to City permitted events. The existing Environmentally Preferred Purchasing Program, or EP3, can be revised to include restrictions on plastic foam and bottled water purchasing for city facilities and government funds. Exemptions for facilities with non-potable water on site or for emergency situations are acceptable. To restrict plastic foam at events, a revision of existing permit applications in the necessary departments (Special Events, Parks and Recreation, and the Water Department) is an acceptable means to encourage vendors to prevent stormdrain and ocean pollution.

### **Restricting Plastic Bottles and Plastic Foam Can Save the City Money**

As we work to stimulate our economy, spending taxpayer money on bottled water is a misallocation of limited resources. For example, in 2007 the city of San Francisco audited its bottled water purchases and found that it was spending nearly \$500,000 each year, leading then Mayor Newsom to cancel all city-spending on bottled water. Furthermore, bottled water undermines confidence in California's public water supply and pollutes the environment. Plastic water bottles in the U.S. require the equivalent of 32 to 54 million barrels of oil a year to manufacture, and 70 percent end up incinerated, buried in our landfills or are discarded on our roadways or in our waterways as litter. The U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution at their 2008 annual meeting encouraging cities across the country to phase out government use of bottled water and promote the importance of strong public water systems.

The proposed regulation will also save money by reducing costs for litter removal. Special events in San Diego often cause litter problems and disposal issues for City Parks and Recreation Staff. Plastic foam comprises 15% of street litter and storm drain litter, according to several cities and counties in California and local jurisdictions currently spend millions of taxpayer dollars each year cleaning litter from streets and storm drains. The County of Los Angeles, for example, spends \$18 million annually to clean litter from streets and storm drain catch basins and over \$4 million each year cleaning beaches, and that County as a policy on spending on bottled water. Only two years after San Francisco banned polystyrene food-ware, the city saw a 36% decrease in polystyrene litter.

**Please Restrict Bottled Water and Plastic Foam at City Facilities and Events by  
January 2012**

The Environmental Services Staff has developed an excellent set of recommendations restricting bottled water and plastic foam purchases and plastic foam at City events. But the recommendations have no meaning and provide no benefits to the City without decisive action from you to implement the recommendations. We strongly urge you to ensure that the report from the Mayor's office contains guarantees that the executive office will take concrete and meaningful action, such as adopting the suggested changes to the EP3 and permit application revisions within a reasonable timeframe. The Environmental Services Staff's recommendations should be implemented no later than January 2012 to provide for expeditious fiscal and environmental benefits for the City.

San Diego's environmental community looks forward to working with your office to restrict polystyrene and plastic bottle waste. Implementing these restrictions will demonstrate the City of San Diego's leadership in sustainability to the greater San Diego community. But the City is not alone in its efforts; 48 other California cities have already committed to reducing plastic foam for environmental reasons, and 28 jurisdictions have limited bottled water purchases to cut wasteful spending for fiscal reasons and support public water systems. We hope that the door will remain open to expanding the restriction of plastic foam use to beyond City events. With your support and leadership, San Diego will continue to be an active part of the Green Cities movement.

Respectfully,


Gabriel Solmer  
*Interim Executive Director*  
**San Diego Coastkeeper**



**SURFRIDER**  
FOUNDATION  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY CHAPTER  
Marisa Espinoza  
Rise Above Plastics Coordinator  
Surfrider Foundation, San Diego County



**SIERRA  
CLUB**  
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Carolyn Chase  
Chair, Sierra Club San Diego Chapter



**WILDCOAST  
COSTASALVAJE**  
Ben McCue  
Conservation Director



**Californians  
Against Waste**  
Sue Vang  
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Irene Stillings  
Executive Director



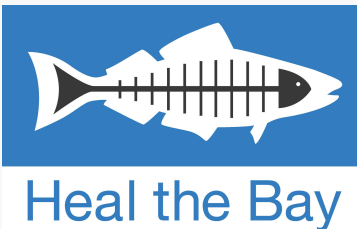
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