

Container ban would hurt businesses and consumers

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Polystyrene has been targeted by the environmentalists for its supposed highly negative impacts on the environment. Does polystyrene leave an imprint? The answer is yes, but so does practically every other product we use, whether it is plastic, glass or paper. To single out polystyrene is unfair and illogical. From its origins in the factory to its eventual disposal, polystyrene has a minimal impact on the environment.

As a light, yet sturdy, substance, polystyrene uses less energy and resources in manufacturing and recycling than either paper or glass. Less fuel is required to transport this product because of its light weight, which means less emissions from trucks. Also, the production of polystyrene creates less greenhouse gas emissions than other materials, and the sturdy nature of the material leads to less waste. These facts not only show that polystyrene is an environmentally friendly product, but helps explain why it is so popular among California restaurants, delis, schools and other food vendors.

Recycling is a noble cause because it is something every individual can do to help keep our environment clean and enjoyable. However, SB 568 mandates a 60 percent recycling rate for all polystyrene foam food containers. It is not realistic to expect a city to know the exact number of polystyrene containers being generated and used annually without intruding into the private business decisions of food vendors.

FULL TEXT

By Randy Gordon

Nobody likes litter, and every schoolchild knows that the responsibility for keeping our public spaces clean lies with the individual. Yet this simple truth, which is taught by parents and teachers, is lost on some of our state legislators, who once again have decided that a problem that can be solved by a healthy dose of personal responsibility should be solved by state regulations.

Long Beach-area State Sen. Alan Lowenthal has proposed an arbitrary and virtually impossible-to-meet statewide recycling mandate solely for polystyrene foam food containers. The bill, SB 568, is a classic case of government overreaction to a problem created by environmental special-interest groups who become hysterical at the mere notion that something could affect the environment, regardless of the facts.

Polystyrene has been targeted by the environmentalists for its supposed highly negative impacts on the environment. Does polystyrene leave an imprint? The answer is yes, but so does practically every other product we use, whether it is plastic, glass or paper. To single out polystyrene is unfair and illogical. From its origins in the factory to its eventual disposal, polystyrene has a minimal impact on the environment.

As a light, yet sturdy, substance, polystyrene uses less energy and resources in manufacturing and recycling than either paper or glass. Less fuel is required to transport this product because of its light weight, which means less emissions from trucks. Also, the production of polystyrene creates less greenhouse gas emissions than other materials, and the sturdy nature of the material leads to less waste. These facts not only show that polystyrene is an environmentally friendly product, but helps explain why it is so popular among California restaurants, delis, schools and other food vendors.

The eco-positive attributes of polystyrene nicely complement the economic benefits offered to restaurants and consumers. Cheaper production costs lead to cheaper prices for hungry patrons, which means more business for

restaurant owners, and therefore, more revenue for cities. This nice little circle offers something for everyone at both the individual and collective levels. A recycling mandate on polystyrene would interrupt this dynamic by forcing cities to take on the cost of solely funding such a program, eating up already scarce resources. It would also drive up business costs by forcing food vendors to purchase more expensive, and less sturdy, materials that cost two to three times more than polystyrene. These costs would then be passed on to consumers, who are already struggling with rising food prices, who will have to pay more for containers that ultimately lead to more waste.

If all of that were not bad enough, there is the fact that hundreds of well-paying jobs would be threatened by this ban. California is home to many polystyrene manufacturing plants that provide an economic base for many communities. This ban could not only lead to job losses, but also to diminished revenue for cities and counties, yet the state wants the cities to absorb the entire cost of this new recycling mandate.

Recycling is a noble cause because it is something every individual can do to help keep our environment clean and enjoyable. However, SB 568 mandates a 60 percent recycling rate for all polystyrene foam food containers. It is not realistic to expect a city to know the exact number of polystyrene containers being generated and used annually without intruding into the private business decisions of food vendors.

Public discussion and debate on voluntary recycling programs for all fast food containers would be welcomed by the business community because the current legislation passively lays all the blame at their feet. The industry deserves to have a voice at the table to help draft a bill that is also fair to them and their customers.

Polystyrene is not the only kind of trash, or the most common. A person is more likely to stumble upon other products, such as napkins, receipts and cigarette butts than polystyrene. Restaurants are not the reason why litter ends up on the streets and on our beaches. The real problem is laziness and carelessness on the part of inconsiderate individuals. There are many ways to compel people to properly dispose of their trash, but punishing businesses and the jobs associated with them is not one of them.

Randy Gordon is president and CEO of the Long Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

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