



April 12, 2023

RE: SUPPORT for Senate Bill 543 A and 545 A

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice-Chair Levy, Vice-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee,

We strongly support Senate Bill 543 A and Senate Bill 545 A aimed at tackling plastic pollution by prohibiting the use of toxic forever chemicals in foodware, phasing out wasteful single-use plastic foam foodware, packing peanuts and coolers, and allowing for reusable and refillable containers in Oregon. Today, nearly 40% of the plastic produced annually is for single-use, a sector that expanded rapidly as a result of a global shift from reusable to single-use containers.

Recycling alone cannot solve the plastics crisis. Even a robust recycling system cannot keep pace with the ballooning production of plastics. Only about 9% of all plastic ever produced has been recycled, 12% has been burned, and the remaining 79% has ended up in landfills or the environment. Most plastic packaging and foodware is not accepted in curbside recycling programs and often contaminates streams of otherwise recyclable material. Plastics place a huge financial and environmental burden on local communities throughout their lifecycle from production to disposal.

The real solution must be reduction. Recycling is like trying to mop water from an overflowing bathtub while the faucet is still running. We need to turn off the faucet and reduce the production of single-use plastic. But that's not what's happening. Production is going through the roof, leading to a constant accumulation of plastic waste, which places a huge financial burden on local communities that often bear the costs to clean up plastic waste. Without immediate changes to the way we use plastics, the total amount of plastic waste generated is expected to double in the next five years.

Globally, 33 billion pounds of plastic enter the marine environment every year, devastating the world's oceans. Plastic does not go away, instead it breaks into smaller pieces that can be mistaken for food by marine life. Plastics have been found everywhere we've looked; from the deepest trenches of the ocean to the rain in the Rocky Mountains and even in our bodies. Oregon is not immune to these impacts. Plastics have been found in Pacific oysters and rockfish off our coast. Plastic pollution is not exclusively a coastal problem. In 2021, Environment Oregon did a [survey](#) of 30 waterways in Oregon and found microfibers and/or microplastic particles in every single waterway they looked at -- from the Willamette, Rogue and Deschutes Rivers to Wallowa Lake and Crater Lake and everywhere in between.

Most plastics are made from fossil fuels and are a significant source of global greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change, sea level rise and ocean acidification. If plastics were a country, it would be the 5th largest emitter of greenhouse gasses. Simply put, we cannot meet our climate goals without reducing our reliance on single-use and disposable plastics.

Additionally, chemical migration of toxic chemicals from food packaging and containers can make their way into our food and drink, increasing the chances of cancer, endocrine disruption, and fertility issues.

You have an opportunity to address these issues head on through two pieces of legislation that have already passed the Oregon Senate with bipartisan support:

- SB 543 A would prohibit the use of polystyrene foam foodware including bowls, plates, cups, lids, clamshells, or other containers and prohibit the sale of polystyrene foam packing peanuts and coolers by January 1, 2025. The bill would also prohibit the use of toxic forever chemicals in foodware containers.
- SB 545 A would update our health code to enable customers to bring reusable and refillable containers for food.

We strongly urge you to vote for SB 543 A and SB 545 A to tackle plastic pollution at the source for the betterment of our environment and our communities.

Sincerely,

Joel Schoening
Chair
Association of Oregon Recyclers

Lisa Arkin
Executive Director
Beyond Toxics

Carolyn Stein
Executive Director
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