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Daly City Styrofoam ban would be pricey

By Andrea Koskey  @SFEX_koskey

A visit to the beach in Daly City started a conversation about the city banning polystyrene products — more commonly known as Styrofoam.

City councilman David Canepa said a recent visit to an area known as the Secret Waterfall — the end of a creek that meets the coastline through a pipeline 100 feet from the ground — at the Daly City-Pacifica border, where piles of Styrofoam lined the beach, was one reason he would like to start the discussion.

“Styrofoam is harsh on wildlife, it’s hard to decompose, and it can have adverse effects on birds and different species if we don’t clean it up,” Canepa said.

Currently, South San Francisco, Millbrae, Pacifica, San Francisco and Oakland have bans. San Mateo County also passed legislation last year that prohibits use of polystyrene foam in county facilities.

An effort to ban polystyrene statewide was pulled from consideration by the bill’s author, Assemblyman Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, because of the adverse impact it could have on jobs during the recession.

If a ban were to be discussed and passed in Daly City, it would mean businesses could no longer use the containers. The largest group of affected businesses would be area restaurants, which find the foam containers cheap and easy to use for leftover or takeout meals.

Al Rios, owner of Al Fin, a Moroccan restaurant in Daly City, said he saw the possibility for the change and voluntarily switched to recyclable products more than a year ago. The cost increase was so significant to absorb, though, that he had to pass it on to his customers.

“If I give it out, I’m losing money,” he said. “I had to increase prices 25 cents to 30 cents when I switched plates and to-go boxes. Now I’m looking at cups, and that could be a dollar more.”

According to Millbrae food service distributor BiRite, which sells a variety of food-packing material, the cost can increase as much as 40 percent for businesses, depending on the products purchased.

For resident and member of the Skyline-Palisades Residential Association Helen Nicely, a ban would mean cleaner beaches and a cleaner environment.

“The amount of Styrofoam down there is phenomenal,” Nicely said. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

Curbing polystyrene use in restaurants

Cities that have banned disposable polystyrene food containers include:

- Berkeley
- Millbrae
- Oakland
- Portland, Ore.
- Santa Cruz
- Santa Monica
- Seattle
- South San Francisco
- San Francisco

akoskey@sfexaminer.com

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ANDREA KOSKEY

akoskey@sfexaminer.com

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