



County of Santa Cruz

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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COUNTY BOARD EXPANDS SUSTAINABILITY ORDINANCE

Demonstrating a renewed commitment to environmental stewardship, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors has taken further steps to help local food service businesses become more sustainable, while reducing litter and cutting the waste flowing into local landfills.

Under new rules that go into effect January 1, 2017, local restaurants and other food service businesses must comply with heightened standards for the use of biodegradable and compostable materials. On that date, all to-go packages, utensils, straws, stir sticks, cups and lids must be certified as fully compostable.

“The County passed its Sustainable Packaging Ordinance back in 2007,” said Tim Goncharoff, County resource planner. “But we’ve learned since then that a lot of the products marketed as compostable or biodegradable really aren’t. And that’s created real problems with our composting program, especially as we’re about to roll it out to many more local businesses.”

Santa Cruz County has long been an early adopter of environmentally friendly practices and policies, and was among the first jurisdictions to implement curbside recycling, ban polystyrene to-go containers and single-use plastic bags, and prohibit the sale of polystyrene toys and other items. The Board also passed a Zero Waste Plan to eventually eliminate landfill waste.

The new rules close a loophole with current regulations, which lack strict definitions of what is considered “biodegradable.” The result was that many products still need to be screened from food waste and in some cases led to food waste being sent to the landfill rather than composted.

The changes are also needed to comply with AB 1826, which expanded California’s Mandatory Commercial Organics Recycling (MORE) law to include a greater number of



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participating businesses. More than 50 Santa Cruz County businesses in the unincorporated area participate in organic waste composting, while local waste hauler GreenWaste Recovery is working with local businesses to double that figure.

Advances in technology and the growth of the biodegradable market have led to many options for local businesses. An independent testing lab, the Biodegradable Products Institute, now certifies products that fully break down in commercial composting operations. A full list of products and sources is available at www.bpiworld.org.

Additionally in 2017, plastic straws and stir sticks, as well as cups lined with plastic and lids made of #6 polystyrene, will no longer be allowed as they cannot be effectively recycled. Small plastics in particular pose a danger to a variety of marine life.

The County will contact food service businesses in the unincorporated area by mail and in person to educate business owners about the new requirements, share samples of acceptable products and to alert business owners about the changes.

For more information, contact County Recycling and Solid Waste Services at (831) 454-2160 or go to the County web site at www.santacruzcountyrecycles.org.