



City of Seattle

How local government policies can impact the biopolymers industry

**Seattle's regulation of single-
use food service packaging**

Seattle
 Public
Utilities

Biopolymers Symposium

San Antonio, October 15-17, 2012

Dick Lilly, Seattle Public Utilities

Like dozens of cities in the West, Seattle started with an EPS ban.

A little history:

The City Council's "Zero Waste Resolution" in 2007 had this to say about consumer products:

"By mid-2008, SPU will conduct a comprehensive study of products, packages and ingredients that could be banned or otherwise discouraged...."

"Initial products for review will include non-compostable plastic shopping bags and Styrofoam food containers."

But just banning EPS wasn't exactly a good thing to do.

Our study told us:

All the replacements for EPS food service ware were worse for the environment.

- Heavier – more costly to ship.
- Denser – used more material.
- Eternal – never break down in a landfill (though that also applies to EPS).
- **And usually not recyclable – certainly not when contaminated with food – but neither is EPS.**

And, if this is your goal:



ALL single-use food service packaging is part of the problem.

Seattle banned EPS food service ware effective January 1, 2009

And, effective July 1, 2010 — 18 months later

The City required ALL single-use food service packaging to be either:

**Compostable, or
Recyclable.**

Compostable preferred.

(Because food-contaminated service ware is not recyclable; it's garbage.)

What made it work?

1. A strong regional composter.

- ☐ Based on established residential Food and Yard Waste collection.

2. Product testing to prove compostability.

- ☐ So restaurants know what they can use.

3. Strong drive to increase commercial food waste collection for composting.

- ☐ Synergy with front-of house compostables disposal in quick serve restaurants (QSRs).

4. Thanks to industry, increasing availability of compostable service ware.

- ☐ From 70 to 700 products in 3 years.

What made it work?

5. Lots of outreach to restaurant and packaging industries.

- ☐ Product fairs and workshops where new products were shown;
- ☐ Stakeholder meetings that brought restaurants, manufacturers and distributors together;
- ☐ Direct mail to Seattle food service businesses – including institutions.
- ☐ Regular presence at restaurant industry trade shows;
- ☐ Thousands of site visits – still!
- ☐ And a few fines for EPS use.

6. Local curbside and commercial recycling systems that accept coated papers and nearly all plastics.

7. Talking to the public.

Free signs available on line that can be customized by each restaurant.



Nowadays, here's what you see in Seattle:

Safeco Field – sign above discard collection station.

SEATTLE MARINERS

Striving For Zero Waste

CEEDAR GROVE COMPOSTING
100% NATURAL
www.cgcompost.com

Food

Food Soiled Paper

Approved Compostable Packaging

NO Plastic. NO Metal. NO Glass.

PLASTICS AND LIQUIDS

PLEASE RECYCLE PLASTIC BOTTLES

JOIN THE GREEN TEAM

Snack Bags

Wrappers

Condiment Packages

Cups

Soiled Foil

Plastic Wrap

Foam Containers

Foam Trays

Food+Compostables

Plastic Bottles

Garbage

The restaurant scene, so to speak.

Signs above the bins work best.



Fast food, outdoors.

Dick's Drive-In



Ivar's on the waterfront



Street fairs and summer festivals are no exception.



Some say this works best.



The bins are down here.

But there are still problems. (No surprise, really.)

1. The wrong stuff.

- ☐ Greenwashing – earth-toned poly-coated papers.
- ☐ Products in use without Cedar Grove approval. This is Seattle's standard. Where are the distributors on this?
- ☐ Look a-likes. How do you tell PET and PLA clear cold cups apart?

2. Recyclable food service products used where compostable is really necessary = CONTAMINATION.

And more problems.

3. Poorly marked discard bins.

The labels are engraved on the rims. This design was abandoned.



And one really big problem.

1. Customers don't know what's on their tray.
2. They don't know if it's compostable or recyclable.
3. They often don't know where to put it even when they spend time with the bin signs.

The problem is labeling.

Or lack of it.

- **Our composter tests and OKs products.**
- **We have a mutual interest in quality products.**
- **But without clear markings on the packaging,**

We get contamination. (This costs \$.)

The industry needs:

1. A standard for compostability.

(In the works, but for the time being, at least, we think we're it.)

❑ Local and state governments have set national standards before.

2. Markings on all food service ware and packaging that clearly tells each QSR or coffee shop patron what is compostable.

Because this is our goal:



Compostable packaging is not an end in itself. But it's essential to diverting leftover food from the landfill.

Only 1/4th of the tonnage diverted from QSRs is packaging.

Here's what's ahead:

1. Seattle is looking hard at banning organics from landfill.

- ☐ 2014 – Single family curbside
- ☐ 2015 – Multi-family
- ☐ 2016 – Commercial, including institutions and restaurants

2. Possible further legislation:

- ☐ The city could require compostable service ware and packaging for all QSR and coffee shop food served for consumption on site. (There is a recyclable loophole because there weren't enough compostable products on the market when the law was passed. Times have changed.)

And here's what's needed:

- 1. A robust “manufactured organics” industry;**
- 2. Clear, consistent product marking – on each item!**
- 3. Rigid adherence to compost standards.**



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