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**Governor Inslee signs ground-breaking Washington State plastics and recycling bill**

*Bans expanded polystyrene products. Mandates minimum recycled content in bottles, jugs and trash bags. First in the nation to comprehensively require opt-in for utensils, cup lids and condiments.*

Seattle, WA – Governor Jay Inslee today signed a new law ([SB5022](#)) that will reduce plastic pollution and improve recycling in Washington. The bill came to him with bipartisan support with the Senate voting 31-17 and the House 73-24. The comprehensive law bans certain expanded polystyrene products, requires opt-in for accessory foodware for take-out food, and mandates post-consumer recycled content in bottles and trash bags.

**Strongest state-wide expanded polystyrene ban in the US**

Washington becomes the 6th state to adopt a statewide ban on expanded polystyrene products and is the most far-reaching. Washington is the first in the nation to ban foam coolers, in addition to packing peanuts and food service products such as hinged clamshells, plates and cups.

“I am thrilled that our new law is the most advanced in the nation,” said the bill’s primary sponsor, Senator Mona Das (D-Kent). “Last year we banned carry-home thin plastic bags. This year, we kept up the momentum and addressed another product that causes problems both in the environment and in our recycling systems.”

Most plastic that goes into our oceans does not go away, instead breaking up into smaller pieces that can be impossible to clean up and are mistaken for food by marine life. “Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing issues facing Washington’s rivers, oceans, and wildlife,” said Mandy Apa, Campaign Associate from Environment Washington. “Taking action to fight plastic pollution now is key to moving towards a more sustainable future.”

“Globally, 33 billion pounds of plastic waste enter our oceans each year,” added Sara Papanikolaou, Washington field representative for Oceana. “This legislative ban on plastic foam foodware, coolers and packing peanuts serves as a meaningful stepping stone toward preventing plastic pollution. We hope other states and the nation will soon follow suit and stop unnecessary single-use plastics at the source.”

“It’s a good day for Puget Sound,” said Alyssa Barton, Policy Manager from Puget Soundkeeper Alliance. “Nine of the top ten types of marine debris collected on Washington beaches and shores during the International Coastal Cleanup in 2020 were plastic items, including styrofoam packaging. The new styrofoam ban will help stop the flow of trash to our waters.”

**First state to require opt-in comprehensively for utensils, straws, cup lids and condiments**

While five states have taken action to ban or require an opt-in for plastic straws, Washington is the first state to comprehensively require that customers be provided single-use utensils, straws, cup lids and condiments only upon request. The law applies to most food establishments, including third party delivery services such as Door Dash and Grub Hub.

“Single-use carryout products are filling up our landfills and polluting our oceans,” said Representative Liz Berry (D-Seattle) who championed the bill in the House. “This new law encourages all of us to act together to protect Washington’s environmental future.”

The Seattle Aquarium regularly collects water samples from Puget Sound and all the samples contain microplastic particles. Nora Nickum, Ocean Policy Manager at the Aquarium, elaborated, "Plastic has been documented in marine habitats all over the planet, even in the deepest ocean trench, but plastic pollution is not a faraway problem. We see it here in our local waters. This law helps ensure wildlife can thrive in a clean ocean."

"Anyone who's ever been at a beach clean-up knows how much plastic is already polluting our state, and how hard it is to clean it up," said Gus Gates, Washington Policy Manager from the Surfrider Foundation. "By reducing single-use plastics, our beaches can start being less of a plastic dumping ground and restored to their natural beauty that is so important for countless Washingtonians."

## **Requires recycled content in bottles, jugs and trash bags, taking it a step further than California**

SB5022 mandates minimum post-consumer recycled content for certain products, helping drive the market for recycled plastic resin.

California passed a similar bill in September 2020 for plastic beverage containers, although Washington's goes further by also including dairy milk and alcohol in the requirements.

Major beverage companies supported these recycled content mandates in California and Washington. These two US standards are the most advanced in the world, going further than Europe. In 2019, the EU adopted a directive on single-use plastic products which require plastic bottles to contain at least 25% recycled plastic from 2025 and at least 30% recycled content by 2030.

Brad Boswell, Washington Beverage Association, explained, "Washington's beverage companies have designed our bottles to be 100% recyclable and feel strongly that companies and government should work together on practical, effective ways to increase the collection of plastic bottles so they can be remade into new bottles. We appreciate the state legislature working with beverage companies and recycling advocates to reach our shared goal of decreasing the use of new plastic. The Washington beverage industry looks forward to continuing conversations next session about collection policies, including Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)."

Washington is the *first* US state to require minimum recycled content for plastic bottles and jugs for household cleaning and personal care products such as laundry detergent, spray cleaners, shampoos, conditioners and lotions: starting with 15% recycled content in 2025 and increasing to 50% in 2031.

The law also contains recycled content standards for trash bags which are 0.70 mil or greater in thickness: 20% by 2027. This level exceeds the only other state with a trash bag mandate, California, which has a 10% standard.

"The inclusion of post-consumer recycled content in plastic packaging creates market demand, which in turn monetizes the entire recycling system," said Brad Lovaas, Executive Director of the Washington Recycling and Refuse Association. "We are required to pick up plastics everyday in our curbside recycling programs for which there is literally no marketplace. This strong incentive will complete the circular economy of plastic packaging. It will lead product manufacturers from using virgin resins to recycled plastic feedstock and provide end-markets for the bales of plastics coming from our facilities."

## **Bill components work together to reduce waste and move to a responsible circular economy**

Plastic pollution also places a huge financial burden on local communities who often bear the costs to clean up plastic waste. The vast majority of plastic waste is not recyclable nor recycled.

As part of improving recycling, the new law also removes the requirement for the chasing arrow recycling symbol on plastic bottles and rigid plastic containers. This symbol is confusing for consumers because even though the symbol is required, not all of these items are actually recyclable.

“Ideally we reduce our use of plastic in the first place by bringing our own bags and reusable water bottles,” said Heather Trim, Executive Director, Zero Waste Washington. “For those items that we recycle, the public wants to make sure it is ‘real recycling.’ That is, manufacturers convert the material from those products into new bottles and bags. The multiple components of this bill get us closer to that true circular economy.”

“In addition, plastics are a danger to public health, as toxic chemicals from plastic packaging can make their way into the food we eat,” continued Giovanni Severino, Lead Policy Organizer, Latino Community Fund of Washington. “This bold action in Washington is setting a standard for states across the country looking to put the planet over plastic and leave a cleaner, healthier environment for our future generations.”

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**Washington Beverage Association**

*The Washington Beverage Association represents beverage producers, bottlers and distributors across Washington state. Our beverage industry has been making quality beverages for more than 100 years, and is dedicated to supporting local communities and helping our customers make informed choices by providing options. We have a direct economic impact of \$3.5 billion in Washington and WBA member companies employ more than 4,500 people across the state.*

**Washington Refuse and Recycling Association (WRRA)**

*WRRA Members promote and provide environmentally and economically sustainable solid waste services across Washington State.*

**Plastics Free Washington Coalition/ Washington Sin Plástico members:**

**Environment Washington**

*Environment Washington is a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization working for a cleaner, greener, healthier future.*

**Latino Community Fund of Washington**

*The Latino Community Fund cultivates new leaders, supports cultural and community based non-profit organizations, and improves the quality of life for all Washingtonians.*

**Oceana**

*Oceana is the largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. Oceana is rebuilding abundant and biodiverse oceans by winning science-based policies in countries that control one third of the world's wild fish catch.*

**Puget Soundkeeper**

*Puget Soundkeeper's mission is to protect and enhance the waters of Puget Sound for the health and restoration of our aquatic ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.*

**Seattle Aquarium**

*Our mission: Inspiring Conservation of Our Marine Environment.*

**Surfrider Foundation**

*The Surfrider Foundation is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches, for all people, through a powerful activist network.*

**Zero Waste Washington**

*Zero Waste Washington drives policy change for a healthy and waste-free world.*