

Seattle passes bag tax, PS ban

By Mike Verespej

WASHINGTON (July 29, 9:40 a.m. EDT) — Seattle has become the first major U.S. city to place a tax on plastic bags, and has also enacted a ban on polystyrene containers for businesses that serve food.

Both the 20 cent fee on plastics, paper and other disposable takeout bags and a ban on PS containers go into effect Jan. 1 and were approved July 28 by Seattle City Council.

In addition, effective July 1, 2010, all businesses that serve food must switch to compostable or recyclable containers and utensils, and grocery stores will be required to stop using PS trays to sell raw meat or seafood.

The Seattle tax on plastic bags is just one of several anti-bag on the West Coast that are threatening to unravel the momentum the industry has built in the last year for mandated at-store recycling as an alternative to bans or fees. The anti-PS momentum continues to build, as well, with 15 bans in California in the past two years and several new initiatives just within the last two weeks.

Other initiatives include:

* The Ocean Protection Council of the state of California, in a report scheduled to be released this week, is recommending a ban on PS takeout containers and either mandated recycling or a ban on plastic bags.

* Los Angeles voted July 22 to ban PS takeout containers at city events and in city facilities, starting July 1, 2009. The newly passed Los Angeles policy resolution also supports a plastic bag ban, effective July 1, 2010, unless the state's proposed 25 cent plastic bag tax, AB 2058, is approved.

* Portland, Ore., which has had a PS ban for nearly 20 years, is also looking at a proposal to place a tax of 5-20 cents on paper and plastics disposable shopping bags.

The Seattle proposal was approved even though the American Chemistry Council ran a week-long radio ad campaign under the auspices of the Seattle Coalition for Responsible Recycling in an effort to stop the bag tax and PS ban. As a result, Seattle becomes an exception to the trend of cities enacting recycling mandates instead of bans, said Keith Christman, senior director of packaging for ACC's plastics division.

Although the Seattle bill has passed, it is far from a finished product.

Amendments adopted by the environment, emergency management and utilities committee a week prior to its passage underscore that.