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REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

HB 354: Restrict Restaurant Use of Polystyrene Sponsor Statement

Plastic pollution is an alarming problem. It is forecasted that global production of plastic will reach a total of over a trillion tons by 2050. The United Nations estimates that so far seven billion tons of plastic waste has been generated globally, with four hundred million tons of plastic waste produced every year. Less than 10 percent of all plastic is recycled (only 5-6 percent of generated plastics are recycled in the US each year).

Polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam, is a particularly troubling material. Plastic foam has served an important but contentious role in recent history. It is a cheap, lightweight material used for food ware products, packing, fishing/docks, and construction. However, convenience and durability are both its greatest strength and its greatest problem. Styrofoam is not recyclable or biodegradable. Additionally, the chemical additives to the foam that give it its unique properties are not chemically bound to the plastic, so they are prone to leaching out into food and the ground.

Non-recyclable plastic foam is a commonly used material for food service ware around the world. International Coastal Cleanup estimates collecting 8.7 million plastic foam cups, plates, and takeout containers since 1986. In the US, especially, plastic foam food service ware is a common waste product. It is estimated that every year 5.6 billion pieces of plastic foam are used by Americans, and 22 percent of all U.S. takeout and delivery orders include plastic foam packaging.

Without proactive measures, Alaska could unintentionally contribute to growing plastic foam waste that negatively impacts the state's environment, wildlife, and health of its citizens.

HB 354 no longer allows polystyrene to be used in restaurants (with exceptions). This follows global trends (such as bans in the European Union, Canada, and India) and national trends (with bans in ten other states and the District of Columbia), and it mimics language from bans in the Alaska cities of Bethel, Cordova, and Seward. Other biodegradable container options are allowed including fiber-based containers already widely used and accepted in places with and without polystyrene bans.

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