

## **Moving Towards a Disposable Foodware Reduction Ordinance**

You don't have to look very far nowadays to find worsening news on climate change. It really is a crisis. Here's a recent quote from Bloomberg Green (7/15/2021) that's bound to get one's attention:

“Humans need to cut greenhouse gas emissions by half by the end of the decade and reach net zero by mid-century to forestall a level of temperature rise that would be catastrophic for all living beings on Earth.”

Given this assessment, local residents at Napa Climate NOW! asked some simple questions. What can we do right now to impact this pending catastrophe? Recycling, composting, EV's, and solar panels are important, but can we influence the bigger contributors to the climate crisis? Can we influence the petroleum industry, for example? That's a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Can we tackle that? Can we do something local that may grow to a larger trend?

These questions became a starting point that has turned into a quest to reduce disposable foodware in Napa County through local legislation.

Napa Climate NOW! has drafted a proposed mandate for adoption county-wide called the *Reusable Foodware and Waste Reduction Ordinance*. The intended goal is to transition food establishments and customers from disposable foodware (plates, cups, straws, napkins, condiment packages, and so on) to reusable foodware where possible, and compostable foodware where disposable is necessary.

### **Why Target Disposable Foodware?**

Why choose to focus on disposable foodware? Because it's a big problem that's getting bigger. Single-use disposable foodware contributes to climate change by using fossil fuel (petroleum) in plastic manufacturing, transportation and disposal. And while disposable foodware made of compostable material may be more easily diverted from landfills, it also contributes to climate change in manufacturing and transportation.

Disposable foodware causes litter (and associated cleanup costs), pollutes our oceans and waterways, and affects the health and life of marine and other animals. It is also beginning to creep into our bodies by way of microplastics which we ingest, potentially causing cancer and other diseases. And disposable foodware actually uses more water over its lifetime than reusable foodware.

According to the Upstream Policy Institute, 561 billion disposable foodservice items were used in the US in 2016, resulting in 4.9 million tons of waste. Restaurants spent \$19 billion on disposable foodware in the US that same year.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office reports that, “Plastic waste—overflowing landfills and polluting oceans—has grown tenfold in the U.S. from 1970-2018, as recycling rates have remained low.” And the advent of COVID has made the proliferation of disposables even worse. According to Business Watch (11/25/2020), the pandemic has more than doubled food-delivery apps’ business, so it’s more important than ever to address the issue now.

In the words of the Upstream Policy Institute, “The bottom line is that we can’t recycle or compost our way to a sustainable future. We have to work upstream to redesign the systems that generate all the waste in the first place.”

### **What’s Being Proposed?**

The draft ordinance proposes five things to address this problem of disposable foodware.

- It requires reusable foodware in dine-in restaurants.
- It requires take-out foodware be given to customers by request only.
- It allows only compostable disposable takeout foodware.
- It eliminates plastic and polystyrene disposable foodware.
- It prohibits plastic beverage bottles for events held on City/County property and in City/County vending machines.

Customers who bring their own reusable items would receive a \$0.25 discount. To encourage customers to bring their own for takeout, there would be an additional \$0.25 charge per disposable cup, and a \$0.25 charge for other disposable foodware per order, up to \$1.00 per order.

Many other communities nationwide have adopted similar foodware ordinances, and evidence shows that businesses fully embracing the concept of reusable instead of disposable can save thousands of dollars a year in reduced inventory purchases and landfill costs. Visit [rethinkdisposable.org](http://rethinkdisposable.org) for examples and testimonials.

Some local food establishments, as well, are already complying with many of the components of this ordinance. Clif Family Winery in St Helena uses compostable foodware for to-go orders at the food truck on site, and is implementing a by-request-only policy for foodware accessories on site and online. “We really like the idea of reusable foodware on site, and compostable for takeout,” said Linzi Gay, General Manager at Clif Family Winery. “If possible, we’d like to even go to reusable foodware for takeout.”

To view the proposed Reusable Foodware and Waste Reduction Ordinance and other information about the problem of disposable foodware, go to [napa.350bayarea.org](http://napa.350bayarea.org).

### **Actions You Can Take:**

*If the people lead...*

- Contact your local and county representatives to encourage them to pass an ordinance like the Reusable Foodware and Waste Reduction Ordinance.
- Contact members of the Countywide Climate Action Committee and encourage them to address the disposable foodware problem.

*Walk the talk...*

- Bring your own reusable cups and other foodware when getting takeout.
- Don't take disposable foodware that you don't need. This includes excess napkins, lid plugs, condiment packets and other unnecessary foodware accessories. When placing an order for takeout, ask the restaurant to "skip the stuff".

*Put your money where your mouth is...*

- Frequent food establishments that use reusables for dining in, and compostables for takeout.
- Encourage your local restaurants to stop using plastic and "go reusable."

By acting now to stem the use of disposable foodware, we can fight climate change in our own backyard, keep our community clean and beautiful, protect our waterways and wildlife, and help make Napa County a true environmental leader. Together we can turn the tide.

*Bob Figoni is a resident of Napa. He retired from a 37-year career in the solid waste field in 2017. He is chair of Napa Climate NOW!'s Waste Reduction Issue Team.*