SAN JOSE CITY COUNCIL SAYS “NO” TO FOODSERVICE PACKAGING RECYCLING, COUNTERING CALIFORNIA TREND

WASHINGTON (August 27, 2013) – San Jose, CA City Council today moved to restrict the use of polystyrene foam packaging for serving food, which would effectively kill efforts to recycle the packaging in the city.

The City Council’s actions would leave the city with no plans for recycling nearly all types of foodservice and take-out packaging. San Jose directs residents to throw paper and other take-out packaging into the garbage, with the exception of clear plastic take-out containers.

Plastics makers have been urging the city to increase recycling. “This is a real step backward for recycling,” said Tim Shestek, Senior Director of the American Chemistry Council in Sacramento. “The City Council’s vote would lead to prohibiting packaging that’s collected in curbside recycling programs elsewhere in California and replacing it with packaging that is thrown in the garbage.”

The move runs counter to the trend in California towards increased recycling of polystyrene foam foodservice packaging, including at curbside. A recent study found that half the population of the state’s fifty largest cities can recycle foam foodservice packaging. In contrast, only two percent of this population can recycle paper foodservice packaging.

The San Jose ordinance would prohibit the use of polystyrene foam foodservice packaging by restaurants and other local foodservice operators, including operators of the many family-owned eateries who objected to the 200 to 500 percent increase in the cost of alternatives. San Jose businesspeople also objected to the lower performance quality of alternatives to foam and urged City Council members not to restrict one of the only foodservice containers being recycled in California.

Despite repeated objections by local businesses, the City Council voted in support of the ordinance during its first reading. To become law, the City Council must vote in favor once more during a second reading, expected for September 3.

Earlier this year some City Council members proposed exploring the feasibility of adding polystyrene foam foodservice packaging to area recycling programs, which would remove more
packaging from the waste stream and help reduce litter. The Council rejected the recycling proposal.

Polystyrene foam foodservice packaging:

- makes up less than one percent of U.S. solid waste, according to EPA;
- represents 1.5 percent of litter, according to a 2012 national litter review;
- uses significantly less energy and water to manufacture than paper alternatives and creates significantly less waste by weight and comparable waste by volume, according to a 2011 life-cycle study; and
- is two to five times less expensive than alternatives.

For more information on polystyrene foam foodservice products and recycling, please visit: www.plasticfoodservicefacts.org.

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