

CLOSING THE LOOP — CLEARING UP CONFUSION ABOUT COMPOSTABLE PACKAGING

By **BRITTE KIRSCH**
Lane County Master Recycler
Special to Siuslaw News

here in Florence, the city has implemented an extended polystyrene (EPS/Styrofoam) ban since 2018 thanks to the efforts by the Environmental Management Advisory Committee. Here, we don't have to worry about an abundance of polystyrene foam packaging ending up in the landfill or our coastal environments. But we do have to be concerned with other disposable materials that wreck havoc on our environment: everything from biodegradable plastics and plastic

coated cardboard to compostables, aka sustainable packaging.

Wanting to do the right thing, many local businesses and food establishments switched over to using compostable or biodegradable containers instead of other options, thinking that it was the more environmentally friendly choice. But as it turns out, not only are these options up to three times more expensive, they aren't necessarily eco-friendly, nor are they easy to compost or dispose of. Let me explain.

First of all, biodegradable and compostable are two different things. It is important to know the differences to better understand how to dispose of them properly and efficiently.

Here are their definitions:

- Biodegradable**
1. A substance or object capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms
- Compostable**
1. Something that can be used as compost when it decays

Examples of 100% biodegradable products are plastic shopping bags, bin liners, dog poop bags, and a variety of food packaging. They are commonly produced with renewable new materials like fermented cornstarch polymers (polylactic acid — PLA) or from a mixture of un-recyclable and harmful bioplastics (Number 7 plastic) such as polypropylene, polyethylene, polystyrene and PVC. The degradation of these plastic products is aided by microorganisms, but, in the end, microplastics and toxic materials will be left in the environment to find their way into our water systems and food chains.

The PLA packaging cannot be recycled with the other plastics since it causes contamination and it requires commercial composting processing and cannot be composted at home. So it ends up in the landfill regardless of how environmental it may be.

According to research done by the nonprofit organization World Centric, only 13% of commercial



composters accept compostable products of the over 4,700 compost facilities in the U.S. These commercial composting facilities are hesitant to take compostable products for various reasons, including contamination, disintegration times, lack of equipment and revenue structures based on selling organic compost.

Currently, Oregon does not have any commercial composting facilities that are willing to process any compostable food service products. This letter is from Oregon composters on this subject: <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/mm/Documents/MessagefromComposter-En.pdf>.

Examples of 100% compostable packaging are paper, cardboard, bamboo, wood or bagasse (sugarcane). NOTE: Plastic liners on some of these containers are not compostable.

These containers can be put in a home composting system and will not degrade into toxic materials. But the environmental impacts of making compostable materials such as the resource extraction, manufacturing, transportation and disposal of these materials and oxygen depletion of waterways due to fertilizer run off are cause for concern.

To truly embrace a ze-

ro-waste lifestyle, we need to generate less waste, whether it's packaging or food. Recently, some cities and food establishments have embraced a more durable, reusable solution to the waste issues. GO Box, a reusable takeout container service, offers containers that are checked out from vendors via an app and then dropped off at designated locations. The company, which is based in Portland, collects, cleans and sanitizes the containers, which are then re-used by other customers. At the end of their lives, the plastic reusable containers are recycled. Similar services are popping up in Seattle, such as Green Grub-Box and another, Rogue To Go, was recently launched in Ashland, Ore.

There is no quick solution to our increased use of single-use disposables. If you choose 100% biodegradable options, unfortunately these must be put in the garbage. But there are smarter choices we can make when you absolutely must make a decision. First choice is opt for easy to recycle items, like glass or metal. If you choose plastic, look for options like No. 2 or 5 containers. If you compost at home, choose cardboard or paper and of course the best choice is bring your own reusable container.

More information can be found at www.worldcentric.com and www.epa.gov/ recycle.

Got ideas for future articles? Need more information about closing the loop? Have questions about your recycling efforts? Please contact me at britte.kirsch@gmail.com or visit Waste Wise Lane County.

We couldn't be prouder to be your community partner.

290+ PPP loan applications funded in our Florence community

\$14.7 Million funds disbursed to local Florence businesses

Helping to preserve over 900 local jobs

Oregon Pacific Bank
(800) 997-7121 | WWW.OPBC.COM
Not Your Ordinary Bank

Brews, Cruise & Tacos Too
SHOW
ENJOY CLASSIC CRUISE, A FREE LUNCH & A TACO
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18TH
11AM - 1PM
RSVP 541.997.8202
sayhello@shorewoodsl.com

Due to the rise in Covid-19 cases Shorewood Senior Living has made the tough choice to keep our residents as well as everyone else in the community of Florence safe; the Brews, Cruise & Tacos Too Car show will now be a drive-thru event. The event will now be held in the front parking lot of Shorewood Senior Living. You can drive through, receive your free Tacos Al Pastor, buy your raffle tickets to be entered to win a 50" T.V. and other awesome prizes, and donate to the Van Fans.

Shorewood SENIOR LIVING
Guided by goodness, loyalty, faith, and fun

541.997.8202
sayhello@shorewoodsl.com
1451 Spruce Street, Florence, OR 97439
shorewoodsl.com

PROFESSIONAL THERAPEUTIC MASSAGE
IVY MEDOW, M.A., O.T.A., L.M.T.

By Appointment (480) 229-6244
AMTA # 1766811 Oregon Massage Lic. # 25705
Space #2 in the Old Hospital on 12th Street

Buying or Selling? I can help.

Richard Beadro
Principal Broker
541 991-6677

2970 Hwy 101 – Commercial property with an open floor plan and plenty of parking right on Hwy 101. Freshly painted interior and mostly new floor coverings. Clean and ready to go inside and out. \$475,000. #3242-21600647

TR HUNTER REAL ESTATE
541-997-1200

1749 Highway 101 • 541-997-1200

Neil's Carpet & Upholstery Cleaning
541-997-3825
Certified - Bonded - Insured

Property Services Contractor #39458 • SAM: #831298500/7E6J9
City License #2578

"Our commitment is to our customers cleaning needs with honesty and integrity"