CLOSING THE LOOP Clearing Up Confusion About Compostable Packaging

By Britte Kirsch Lane County Master Recycler has implemented an ex-Special to Siuslaw News

caused an uptick in the amount of to-go/take away containers being used Fortunately

here in Florence, the city polystyrene foam packaging coated cardboard to comtended polystyrene (EPS/ Styrofoam) ban since 2018 pandemic has thanks to the efforts by the cerned with other dispos-Environmental Management Advisory Committee. Here, we don't have to worry about an abundance of

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ending up in the landfill or our coastal environments.

But we do have to be conable materials that wreck havoc on our environment: everything from biodegradable plastics and plastic

290+ PPP

postables, 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, polyethlyene, 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

done by the nonprofit oronly 13% of commercial

According to research ro-waste lifestyle, we need to generate less waste, ganization World Centric, whether it's packaging or food. Recently, some cities and food establishments

> reusable solution to the offers containers that 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

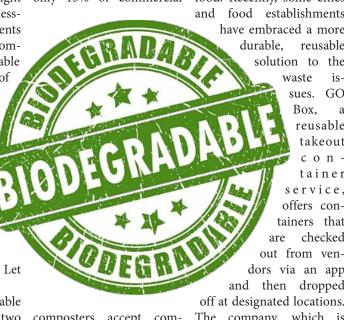
in Ashland, Ore. There is no quick solution to our increased use of single-use disposables. If you choose 100% biodegradable options, unfortunately these must be put in the garbage. But there are smarter choices we can make when you absolutely must make a de-

cision. 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.worldcen tric.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.

AMTA # 1766811



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.

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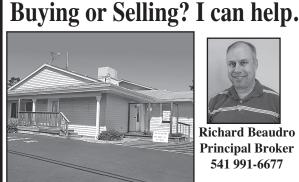
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