Upstream

Highlights

- Disposable Product Charges will make reusable alternatives more attractive – a win for the planet, business, and local communities.
- The policy ensures that food service operators:

  No longer give customers disposables for free, and

  Provide a reusable alternative

Fact Sheet:

Disposable Cup and Container Charges

Policies aimed at reducing single-use disposables in take-out

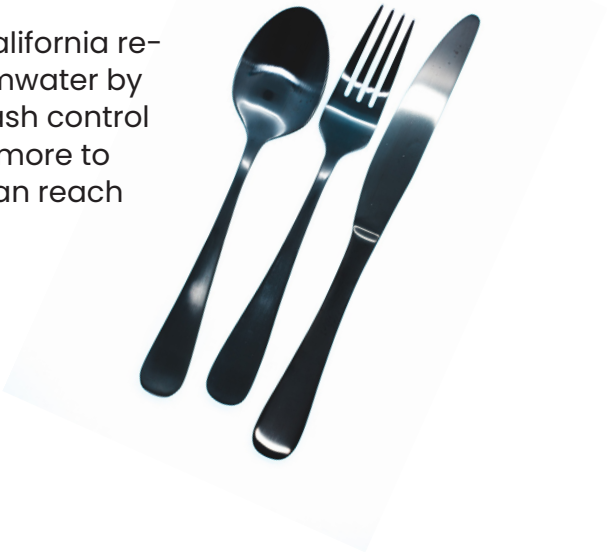
Disposable Product Charges will make reusable alternatives more attractive – a win for the planet, business, and local communities.

Reusable foodware beats single-use alternatives by every environmental measure – compared to disposables – as long as they are used enough times (generally between two and 122 uses[1]).

Benefits of reuse

Transitioning to reusables always saves food businesses money. ReThink Disposable has demonstrated businesses save money 100% of the time – between $3,000-$22,000 per year. Nationally, businesses spend $24 billion on 1 trillion disposable foodware items and could save $5 billion while reducing 86% of disposables with reuse in on-site dining and take-out[2].

Reducing foodware litter benefits local government: In 2015, California required all jurisdictions to eliminate discharges of trash to stormwater by 2030.[3] Jurisdictions were spending $458 million per year on trash control prior to the issuance of the new policy.[4] They will spend much more to comply. Nationally, avoided solid waste management costs can reach $5.1 billion.[5]



The problem

- Nearly 1 trillion pieces of disposable foodware (utensils, condiment packets, cups and food containers, straws, etc.) are used in the U.S. every year, creating 9 million tons of waste and 20 billion pieces of litter.[6]
- Disposable foodware adds toxic chemicals to our food, pollutes the environment, increases greenhouse gas emissions, and wastes water.[7]
- It pollutes our oceans. 11 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year.[8] 70% of trash entering the ocean is food and beverage packaging, and it's 74% of the top 20 littered items in beach cleanups.[9]
- By 2050, there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish.[10]
- Disposable foodware has significant environmental impacts. For example, the 120 billion disposable cups used by Americans each year (374 per person) means:

over 11 million trees logged

2,2 billion pounds of waste

25 billion gallons of water consumed

4 billion pounds of CO_2 emissions[11]

The solution

Plastic and paper grocery bag charges have been 75%-90% effective in:

Reducing single-use plastic bags and increasing reuse:

- **Los Angeles Co.** 95% reduction[15]
- **Alameda Co.** 80% reduction[16]
- **Washington D.C.** 75% reduction[17]
- **Great Britain** 80% reduction[18]
- **Taiwan** 68% reduction and 80% increase in reusables[19]

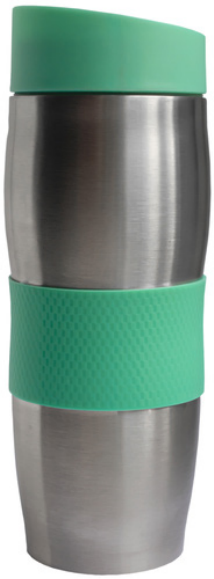
Reducing plastic bag litter:

- **Alameda Co.** 44% reduced in storm drain litter[20]
- **San Jose** 89% reduced in storm drain litter, 60% in creeks and rivers, 59% street litter[21]
- **California** plastic bag beach litter reduced by 60% after state bag law enacted[22]

Charges are more effective than discounts and voluntary measures

People are more likely to change behavior in response to smaller charges than higher level discounts.[12]

Voluntary measures have not worked. Starbucks committed to selling 25% of its beverages in reusable cups by 2015 but failed to take serious steps to achieve the goal, reaching a 1.4% rate by 2018.[13]



Cities that have enacted disposable foodware charges to date, 2019-2021[14]

- 25 cents on cups and containers: **Arcata, CA**
- 25 cents on cups in California: **Berkeley, Fairfax, City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, and San Anselmo. Also, Vancouver, B.C.**
- 10 cents for cups: **Watsonville, CA**
- 25 cents for cups and for utensils: **Culver City, CA**

Important provisions to include

The charge must be visible, i.e. shown to the customer on the receipt. Businesses can add the charge to the price of the beverage or meal, or deduct the charge from the cost of the beverage or meal.

Determine who keeps the monies collected from the charge. Each jurisdiction should determine whether an environmental fee or charge will be considered a tax. In some states, such as California, if some or all of the monies collected go to the government for purposes related to the policy, the charge may be construed as a tax, requiring a 2/3 majority vote. Where a 2/3 vote is unlikely, businesses should be allowed to keep the charge. This will help businesses offset the costs of providing reusable alternatives. In other states, policies could require some monies collected to provide support for waste management, litter removal, or reuse grants.

A returnable reusable option must be available at lower cost than the disposable to ensure that businesses that collect the disposable charges aren't perversely incentivized to promote disposables.

A customer's BYO cup, container, or utensil should be accepted if in satisfactory condition, with exceptions for public health emergencies.

Customers report that a 25 cents is the lowest charge likely to incentivize them to BYO cup.[23]

People on food and medical assistance should be exempt to address concerns about affordability for low-income customers.

Endnotes

1 Upstream (2021), Reuse Wins: The environmental, economic, and business case for transitioning from single-use to reuse in food service.
2 ibid.
3 https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/trash_Control/
4 NRDC: Waste in Our Waterways
5 Upstream, Reuse Wins.
6 ibid.
7 ibid.
8 Pew Charitable Trusts (2020), Breaking the Plastic Wave: Top Findings for Preventing Plastic Pollution.
9 67% of street litter in storm drain hot spots was food and beverage packaging according to Clean Water Action (2011) Taking out the Trash Survey. International Coastal Cleanup Day data shows 69% of top 10 items collected are food and beverage packaging and all 10 are plastic. Similar results found in BanList2.0.
10 New Plastics Economy, Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2016).
11 www.rethinkdisposable.org: Cups fact sheet
12 T.A. Homonoff, Can Small Incentives Have Large Effects? The Impact of Taxes versus Bonuses on Disposable Bag Use, National Tax Association Proceedings, Princeton University.
13 https://www.breakfreefromplastic.org/2018/03/13/global-campaign-challenges-starbucks-keep-promise-curb-plastic-pollution-create-100-recyclable-cup/
14 Upstream tracks reusable foodware policy developments at www.upstreamsolutions.org/policytracker
15 "Single Use Bag Ordinance, Los Angeles County, CA," Green Cities California, January 27, 2013.
16 http://reusablebagsac.org/overview
17 http://www.thejournal.ie/coffee-cups-poll-3642333-Oct2017/
18 http://www.wired.co.uk/article/plastic-coffee-cups-environmental-audit-committee-25p-charge-throwaway-culture-recycling-ban
19 Melanie Bergmann, Lars Gutow, Michael Klages (2015) Marine Anthropogenic Litter, Science, p. 413.
20 http://reusablebagsac.org/overview
21 http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf
22 California Ocean Protection Council (2018) California Ocean Litter Prevention Strategy, p. 14
23 Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund (2016), Reducing Litter and Achieving Zero Waste by Charging for Take-out Cups, see surveys conducted in Berkeley and San Francisco; Poortinga W. (2017) Results of A Field Experiment to Reduce Coffee Cup Waste, Cardiff University.