

Minutes from meeting with City of Seattle Staff  
March 5, 2007

City Staff Present: Tim Croll, Ray Hoffman, Vicky Beaumont, Steve Nicholas

Foam-Free Seattle members present: Aura Weinbaum, Sarah Nason, Kate Werner, Eric Thomas, Kristina Hertz, Heather Trim, Ellie Rose, Jimmy Magiasis

The meeting opened with introductions. Tim Croll is the Community Services Director of Seattle Public Utilities, Vicky Beaumont is the Solid Waste Performance manager at Seattle Public Utilities, Ray Hoffman is Director of Corporate Policy and Performance with Seattle Public Utilities and Steve Nicholas is Director of the City of Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment. Foam-Free members gave their names, occupations, neighborhood of residence and a brief reason for their interest in working on the ban.

Ellie presented our request that the Mayor present an initiative banning the use of polystyrene products to council by the end of 2007.

*Why ban needed*

We then addressed the reasons a ban is needed. Jimmy gave a brief presentation on the health hazards of polystyrene including neurological, hematological, cytogenetic and carcinogenic effects. Heather addressed environmental concerns about plastic pieces building up in the environment and being ingested by aquatic species. Sarah presented concerns about solid waste reduction needs and the advantage of reducing wastes going to landfills (including costs).

Polystyrene bans in other cities were discussed by Aura. She reported that polystyrene is already banned in numerous cities and counties nationwide. The extent of bans in other cities varies from just take-out containers to the retail sale of food items such as eggs and meat, and some cities, the city governments themselves will not use polystyrene to serve food and beverages at events they organize.

Eric presented a report on the biodegradable bio-based alternatives to polystyrene, some of the lifecycle issues related to these, and the pros and cons of the various alternatives. There are a number of effective emergent alternatives to polystyrene available.

We discussed cost impact on businesses – it was reported that costs rose 15-50% for businesses using alternatives to polystyrene. In some cases, bans included a provision that businesses could charge an additional fee.

*City's efforts to date*

The City's consultants are currently working on a solid waste study, which is due out in April. During the second quarter the Mayor will present a recommendation to the city council based on these findings. He will address measures that should be included in the solid waste program.

Tim told us that in the early 90's Seattle instituted the separation of yard waste from garbage collection. In 2004 commercial businesses were prohibited from disposing of paper and cardboard in the garbage. In 2005 warning notices were issued to businesses in violation of the ordinance, and in 2006 actual enforcement went into effect.

As chair of the Utilities Committee of the city council, council member Richard Conlin requested a zero waste study be conducted by a consultant working jointly with SPU and the council, to be supervised by the city staff. It is to be finished by the end of March. The study looks at tonnage going to landfills and problem poisons in the waste stream. An example of this is electronic equipment is to be recycled where it was bought.

There will likely be funds remaining once the survey is completed, so there is the possibility of doing a quantitative analysis of polystyrene in the waste stream. We can contact Sarah Nelson in Richard Conlin's office to learn more about this

#### *Other issues*

- Switching to the use of packaging material other than that which simply disintegrates or has to be disposed of. There is paper available through commercial organics programs.
- Effects of the alternatives, as there can be unanticipated consequences.
- Ubiquitous use of foamed packaging for shipping of electronic equipment.
- Polystyrene emissions profile in disposal. What factors should be considered in mummified landfills vs. accelerated decomposition? Methane emissions from decomposition in landfills are being captured on some places as a useful fuel. Should also consider the lifecycle in upstream carbon emissions of petroleum in the production of polystyrene. There are externalities should be taken into account of the short and long-term costs of continued polystyrene production and use.
- The Environmental Defense Fund did an analysis of McDonald's food service materials, which we should look at.
- Use of polystyrene in docks.
- Legal issues of bans in other locations

#### *Next steps*

1. Coordinate addressing issues raised at the city meeting (Ellie)
2. Identify local and national businesses to sign on for public support of the ban.
3. Contact UW scientist who has been studying sea trash.
4. Work on mutual information pool to be shared with City.
5. Contact Richard Conlin's office (Heather)
6. Set up followup meeting in early April with Vicky Beaumont.
7. Begin work on developing proposal language.
8. Look at economic analysis piece about costs and benefits of a polystyrene ban and add information from other cities.
9. Conduct a solid analysis of paper alternatives
10. Continue investigation of the experience in other cities (Aura and Heather)