

City Auditor's Highlights

Single-Use Polystyrene Food Containers and Plastic Bag Study

Report No. 18-04



BANNING POLYSTYRENE SINGLE-USE FOOD CONTAINERS WILL NOT REDUCE LITTER



Minimizing litter to keep our natural environment beautiful and safe from harm is an important community objective. To be successful, the city must pursue comprehensive methods rather than a simplistic ban on a single kind of litter/trash that is unlikely to effectively reduce the overall amount of litter and its harm to the environment.



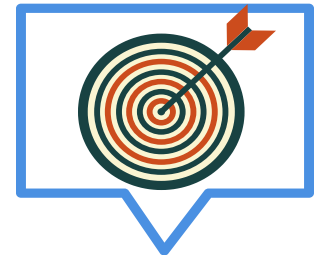
Honolulu is a Waste-To-Energy City

The City and County of Honolulu employs a Waste-To-Energy combustion plant known as H-POWER. All single-use food service products, **if properly disposed of**, are collected by the Department of Environmental Services and private refuse collectors. These collections are taken to H-POWER and burned, converting the Honolulu's plastic and compostable food container waste into energy. **H-POWER currently produces up to 10% of O'ahu's electricity.**



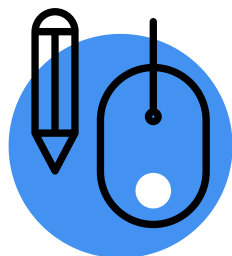
A Ban Will Have Little Effect on O'ahu's Litter

Studies have shown that **bans only change the composition of litter**. The amount of the banned item found in litter will be reduced, but when the item is already a small component of litter, the difference is negligible. Our field observations confirm that **much of the litter and debris we observed at city parks and beaches would be unaffected by a ban on polystyrene food service items.**



Targeted Enforcement of Existing Litter Ordinances

The City and County of Honolulu should implement targeted enforcement of existing litter ordinances to reduce the blight and environmental hazards of litter. Under current conditions, **there is not enough staffing to prioritize enforcement of the litter ordinance** or perform litter removal. In 2017 the Police Department issued **380 citations** but only 8 cases were initiated for littering. This means **around 2% of these cases are enforced as intended.**



Polystyrene (PS) Single-Use Food Container Ban Impact Highlights

Resident Impacts

A majority of respondents support a PS food container ban, even if prices increase

A PS food container ban will likely mean even higher prices for residents

Residents who may experience the most hardship from a PS container ban are likely to be elderly residents who are on a fixed income and lower income residents

Business Impacts

A majority of respondent owners support a PS food container ban

Owner support for a PS food container ban comes from a belief that the ban will not affect their business

Businesses who may experience the most hardship from a PS container ban are likely to be small restaurants with less than 10 employees, many of which are unique to Hawaii



For the full report, click or go to:
<http://www.honolulu.gov/rep/site/oca/>
To see other audit reports from the Office of the City Auditor:
<http://www.honolulu.gov/auditor/reportsworkplans.html>