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Fort Collins voters pass landmark plastic bag ordinance to fight plastic pollution

Ordinance 26 adds pressure to state to pass statewide single use plastics legislation

(FORT COLLINS, COLORADO)--Fort Collins voters have elected to join 16 other Colorado communities and 450 US cities in regulating plastic disposable carry-out bags. On April 6th, Fort Collins voters overwhelmingly passed Ordinance 26--a phase-out of single-use plastic bags at large grocery stores beginning May 22, 2022. The measure is expected to reduce plastic bag litter in the city.

"I am thrilled that Fort Collins voters chose to do the right thing for our city and our environment to reduce plastic waste in our community," said Fort Collins Councilmember Julie Pignataro. "This is a small step that will have a huge impact on the overall health of our neighborhoods."

At the state level, a coalition of groups, including Eco-Cycle, Environment Colorado, COPIRG, Sierra Club, Inland Ocean Coalition, 350 Colorado, Green Latinos and Good Business Colorado have been working with legislators to pass a larger plastics policy, the Plastic Pollution Reduction Act, or HB21-1162. The bill, similar to Fort Collins' ordinance, will ban single-use plastic bags at all retail stores and in addition, will ban polystyrene foam food containers starting in 2022. With Fort Collins joining 16 other Colorado cities in passing bag ordinances, the groups see momentum building for the state legislature to act.

"Today the residents of Fort Collins have joined the residents of Boulder, Denver, and many other Colorado cities sending a clear message to the state legislature. It is time to act now. The plastic pollution problem and its resulting climate impact cannot be ignored and we cannot wait for each city to act. The Plastic Pollution Reduction Act will set a standard across the state," said Randy Moorman, Director of Legislative and Community Campaigns at Eco-Cycle.

Plastic pollution is a growing problem in Colorado as it is in other parts of the country and the world. Recent scientific reports indicate that more than 1,000 tons of plastic particles rain down on National Parks and the wilderness in the western US every year, including in Rocky Mountain National Park. Cattle and horses can swallow plastic bags causing suffocation and

economic consequences for ranchers. Plastic bags were also the largest source of litter found in creek cleanups in Colorado.

“We have a plastic pollution crisis. Reducing the massive amount of plastic ending up in our landfills, waterways, and food sources is a necessary step that is widely supported by Coloradans- over 48,000 of them. We just need to stop using these single-use plastic products. They are unnecessary, easy to replace, hard to recycle, and toxic.” said Hannah Collazo, Environment Colorado Director.

HB21-1162 addresses the worst plastics - polystyrene foam food containers and single-use plastic bags. Polystyrene foam is one of the most harmful plastics to human health. It is a known carcinogen that can leach into our food. Both polystyrene foam containers and plastic bags break down into smaller and smaller pieces, known as microplastics that can get into our air, water, and eventually our bodies.

Jan Douglas, Legislative Committee Co-Chair for the Colorado Sierra Club, also applauds the passage of the plastic bag initiative in Fort Collins. “It is time for all of us to work to reduce the plastic pollution that threatens our environment and our health. The Sierra Club looks forward to moving forward now with the state legislation which will move Colorado as a whole forward towards accomplishing that goal.”

Proponents of both the Fort Collins initiative and HB21-1162 believe phasing out these harmful and unnecessary plastics will have a significant impact on addressing plastic pollution. For example, the City of Fort Collins estimates the community uses almost 52 million disposable bags each year. National studies indicate that only 10% of plastic bags get recycled. The rest of the bags are either landfilled or enter our environment where they pose a threat to wildlife and human health.

Cities that have implemented policy measures similar to Fort Collins have achieved significant results in reducing plastic waste and pollution, including an 80% decline in the use of plastic and paper bag use, a 200% increase in customers using reusable bags or going with no bag, and as much as a 90% reduction in plastic bag litter.

Danny Katz, Executive Director of CoPIRG said, “These single-use plastics take centuries to break down if they ever do. Nothing we use once to move our food or hold our beverages should pollute our community for hundreds of years. It is exciting that Fort Collins joins other Colorado communities in taking action on this critical issue of our time and it bodes well for the state to do the same.”

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Eco-Cycle is one of the oldest and largest nonprofit recyclers and Zero Waste organizations in the U.S. Eco-Cycle innovates, implements and advocates for local and global Zero Waste solutions to foster a more sustainable, equitable and climate resilient future. For more information: www.ecocycle.org

Colorado Sierra Club is part of the national Sierra Club, the nation's oldest environmental organization with more than 100,000 active members and supporters in Colorado. For more information: <https://coloradosierraclub.org/>
Environment Colorado is a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization working for a cleaner, greener, healthier future. For more information, visit: www.environmentcolorado.org
CoPIRG – the Colorado Public Interest Research Group is a non-profit, public interest advocacy group working for a safer and healthier Colorado where everyone is freer to pursue their individual well-being and the common good. For more information: www.copirg.org