

A Policy Approach to Reducing Disposable Food Packaging and Litter



*A Survey of Food Business Owners
Berkeley, California*

APRIL 2018

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Clean Water Fund is a national 501(c)(3) research and education organization that has been promoting the public interest since 1974. Clean Water Fund supports protection of natural resources, with an emphasis on water quality and quantity issues. Clean Water Fund's organizing has empowered citizen leaders, organization, and coalitions to improve conditions of hundreds of communities and to strengthen policies at all levels of government. www.CleanWaterFund.org



Clean Water Action is a national 501(c)(4) environmental organization with nearly one million members nationwide. Clean Water Action works for clean, safe, affordable drinking water, prevention of health-threatening pollution, creation of environmentally safe jobs and businesses, and empowerment of people to make democracy work. Clean Water Action has organized strong grassroots groups, coalitions, and campaigns to protect our environment, health and economic well-being, and community quality of life. www.CleanWaterAction.org

A Policy Approach to Reducing Disposable Food Packaging and Litter

Background

Clean Water Action (CWA) and Clean Water Fund's (CWF) **ReThink Disposable** program aims to inspire measurable behavior change in businesses and institutions to prevent waste, plastic pollution, and marine debris from single use disposable food and beverage packaging at the source. Clean Water's California program, founded in 1990, has a track record of educating the public about trash in waterways, eliminating plastic pollution in inland and coastal waterways, and reducing disposable food packaging, a primary component of street litter in busy commercial districts (67%) according to a study CWF conducted in 2011, from flowing down the watershed and polluting marine habitats.



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ReThink Disposable has engaged over 1,000 food businesses in five counties of the San Francisco Bay Area with source reduction messaging. Auditors help businesses build efficiency into their operations where **ReThink Disposable** certification metrics, such as, packaging and waste reduction, and cost savings are tracked and quantified through an audit to measure the impact of businesses' source reduction operational changes. To date, the program has certified 130 small, locally owned and operated food businesses around the San Francisco Bay Area and five institutions in reducing disposable products usage by over 10 million items and preventing over 125 tons of waste each year. Case studies and business video testimonials have been designed and shared on our website, www.rethinkdisposable.org.

There are many challenges with a voluntary approach in achieving behavior change and waste reduction goals at the municipal level, thus mandatory and citywide approaches have long been of interest. In Berkeley, with its long history of leadership on this issue dating back to the 1986 ban on Styrofoam foodware, a group of civic leaders and environmental professionals came together in 2017 to explore bold and innovative ways to move from voluntary and incremental approaches to solutions that engage the whole city, its businesses, residents, and public works services in reducing waste and pollution. Hosted by the Ecology Center, this loose coalition calls itself *Zero Waste Berkeley*, and Clean Water Action as a central partner to the coalition, agreed to lead a business survey in collaboration with the other partners.

Because of the long history of Berkeley's non-profit curbside recycling collection provider, the Ecology Center, and its efforts to keep recycling true to its environmental values and mission, Berkeley has a strong foundation on which to build to develop and implement these bold and innovative strate-



“...any change is difficult and all options must be pursued in response to a massive surge in the production and use of single-use disposables.”

gies. This foundation, tied to a high environmental consciousness among residents, students, businesses, civic institutions, and elected officials combined with the current surge in public awareness and outrage over plastic pollution, the crisis in recycling exports and prices, and the requirement of cities to eliminate litter to stormwater by 2022 in the Bay Area in accordance with the California State Water Board’s *Trash Amendments*, created a context in which such options are not only possible, but necessary. This survey was produced in this context to reveal how proposed solutions would be received by the food service businesses in Berkeley, and to inform policy options going forward. This process was entered into with the understanding that any change is difficult and all options must be pursued in response to a massive surge in the production and use of single use disposables.



Targeting Single-Use Disposable Foodware Items by Charging Customers for Disposables and Mandating Reusable Food Ware for On-Site Dining

Clean Water Action’s 2011 San Francisco Bay Area litter survey demonstrated that 67% of the litter on busy commercial streets is comprised of disposable food and beverage packaging. Take-out cups and all the items that go with them (lid, sleeve, stir stick, etc.) comprise 19% of the litter on Bay Area streets and food packaging and containers another 49%. Therefore, we conclude that a significant amount of litter can be eliminated by mandating that food businesses provide reusable food ware items when patrons dine on site and that a charge is placed on disposable cups and food ware packaging to reduce use.

“67% of the litter on busy commercial streets is comprised of disposable food and beverage packaging.”

Clean Water Action aided in the development of a model ordinance to help reduce disposable cup and food ware packaging usage in local jurisdictions. The model ordinance mimics the paper bag charge that is incorporated into California state law — SB 270. In the bag ban, there is a 10 cent charge for the sale of paper bags with an exemption for those who receive subsidies under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and SNAP for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Therefore, when a customer forgets to bring reusable bag to the store, he or she can still get a disposable one but it’s no longer free — it has to be purchased. The charge helps people remember to “Bring Your Own” or “BYO” and encourages customers to slow down and dine in on reusable food service ware to avoid charges. Such an ordinance applies the same rationale and approach to disposable hot and cold beverage cups and disposable food containers — it applies a charge for the disposable products that is intended to help people remember to BYO and dine-in, since businesses will be required to provide reusable food ware items when patrons dine on site. Individuals who receive subsidies from SNAP and WIC will be exempted from charges, modeled after the exemption in the California Bag Ban. Research states that consumers are more motivated to make better choices for the environment by avoiding a charge rather than receiving a discount.

There are two significant benefits to the City associated with reducing single

use disposable cups and food ware items. First, charging for disposable cups and food containers and requiring the use of reusable food ware items for on-site dining will help reduce the quantity of trash and litter that the City has to manage in a waste stream or as litter. Secondly, reducing cup and food container waste will also aid a city by helping it reach its 2020 Zero Waste Goal. Businesses will also benefit by saving significant money from avoided disposable food ware costs and reduced waste hauling services.

Survey of Berkeley Food Businesses: Practices, Opportunities, and Barriers to a Policy Approach Targeting Disposable Food Packaging

Methodology: Clean Water Action developed a questionnaire with the advice and input from the Zero Waste Berkeley Coalition and trained thirteen volunteers to conduct business outreach and surveying in Berkeley’s eight City Council Districts. Surveyors were given a list of randomly selected food businesses by district from a list of all businesses in Berkeley, which have food and/or beverage service, walked into each business on the list, and asked to speak with the owner or manager. Surveys were conducted primarily in person. In a few instances, if the owner was not present or available, a follow up phone call or email was made if possible.

Food Business Surveys

Surveys were completed with 59 food business owners in the eight districts in Berkeley, representing approximately 10% of affected food businesses. The goal of the survey is to determine a business’ current disposable packaging practices for dine-in and to-go, practices to incentivize customers to engage in BYO behavior, future practices the owner/operator would consider to reduce packaging, and if businesses support a legislative approach to mandate reusable food service ware for dine-in and charging for disposable food and beverage packaging to-go. A full list of interview questions is included in the *Appendix*. Businesses of different sizes and service types were surveyed including at least one in each of the commercial districts and council districts.

Key Findings from the Business Survey

Businesses have concerns about single-use disposable foodware.

Clean Water Action’s survey findings indicate that there is a strong voice among the Berkeley food business community in favor of reducing disposable food packaging waste to address environmental impacts. The chart below displays the distribution of responses regarding their current concerns with takeout food ware. The most significant concerns businesses expressed are around environmental issues and impacts from the packaging. The most frequent concern was “customers are concerned about the recyclability, compostability, or disposal of food ware” (23% of 57 Responses). The second most frequent concern was the litter created by disposable containers (21% of 57 Responses).



“Consumers are more motivated to make better choices for the environment by avoiding a charge rather than receiving a discount.”

General Concerns with Disposable Food Ware

57 Responses

Customers are concerned about their recyclability, compostability, or disposal
23%

Customers worry about them polluting the ocean
12%

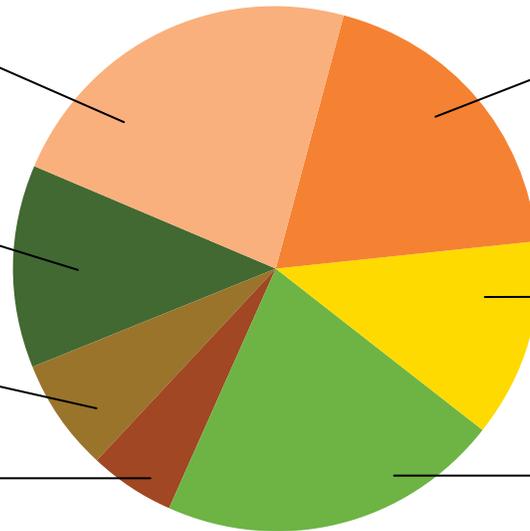
Customers are concerned about potential toxicity
7%

They are not aesthetically pleasing for customers
5%

It is expensive to offer to customers for free
20%

It costs me a lot to dispose of the dirty ones
12%

They produce a lot of street litter
21%



Food business operators express more concern regarding the environmental impact of the single-use packaging than with the cost of consistently purchasing, restocking, and then having to sort and haul all of the food service ware discards. Although the ongoing cost to the business operation to purchase single use disposable food ware was the third most frequent concern (20% of 57 Responses), 46% of the 51 businesses interviewed used all or mostly disposable food ware items. Businesses that provide disposable food ware items were asked how easy it would be to switch to reusable food ware and, if difficult, what are the issues surrounding this transition.

Only slightly more than 1/3 of businesses reported “Great Difficulty” in moving to reusable foodware.

Concerns with switching to reusable food ware are as follows: (ordered from most frequent to least)

1. Cost of additional labor (23%)
2. Inadequate dishwashing capacity (21%)
3. Additional costs of reusable food ware (18%) and Other (18%) (see below rankings)
4. Theft/Loss of reusable food ware (14%)
5. Cross-Contamination (6%)

Nine out of the 42 respondents to this question replied “Other,” stating “We are not a dine-in facility.” Overall, these results show that the majority of Berkeley restaurants are either currently using some reusable food ware items, or would be willing to consider switching to more reusable items. Of the businesses that believe it would be very difficult to make the switch, the most significant concerns are additional costs and logistics around implementing reusable food ware items into their current business operation.

Difficulty in Switching to Reusables

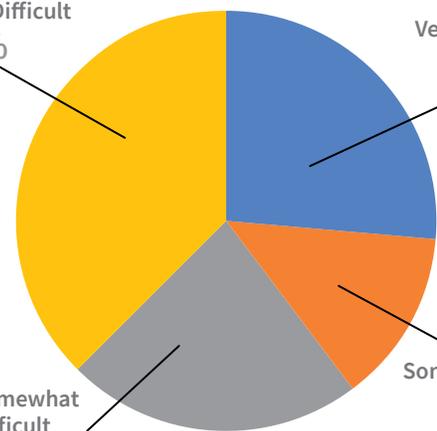
53 Responses

Very Difficult
37%

Very Easy
26%

Somewhat Difficult
22%

Somewhat Easy
15%



A majority of businesses would support a uniform charge for disposable cups.

Of the 52 Berkeley food businesses that responded to the questions regarding disposable cup usage and reduction, 67% said they would be interested in creating *customer incentives* to reduce disposable cup use and 33% said they would not be interested at all. Businesses that were amenable to offering an incentive to reduce disposable packaging for beverages were asked if they would offer a discount to customers that Bring Your Own (BYO) cup or charge for the disposable packaging and the findings are as follows:

- Of the 27 businesses that indicated they would provide a discount, the most frequent discount price they were willing to provide was \$0.10.
- Of the 10 businesses that already provide a BYO cup discount the most frequent used Discount Price Provided: \$0.50
- Of the 23 businesses that were willing to charge customers for the use of the disposable cup the most frequent cost they were willing to charge was \$0.25.

As a follow-up to Option B, charging for disposable cups, businesses were asked if they would be more willing to charge for disposable cups **if all businesses were required to charge the same**

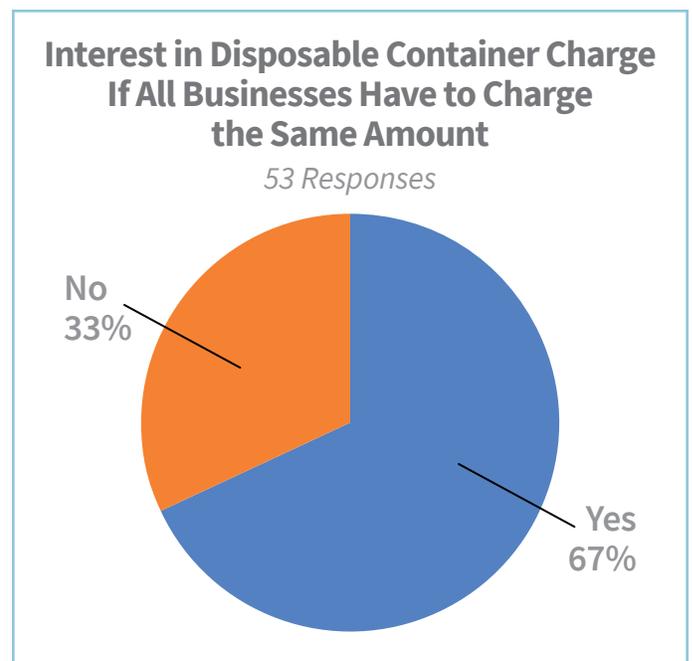
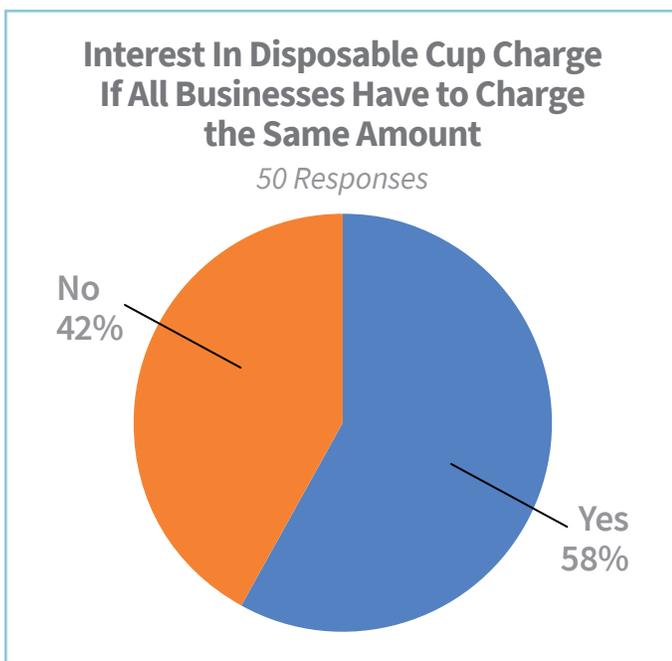
amount. Of the 50 businesses who responded, 58% said “Yes,” they would have a higher interest in charging a fee and 42% said “No,” their interest would not increase. Businesses were asked how they would feel reducing their disposable cup use by charging for the packaging. The revenue from this would then be invested into one of the below scenarios:

- Half of the revenue goes to street cleaning and half of revenue the business gets to keep (74% “Yes”, 26% “No”, 46 Responses)
- All revenue goes to street cleaning (66% “Yes”, 34% “No”, 46 Responses)
- All revenue is kept by businesses (63% “Yes”, 37% “No”, 43 Responses)

Only 9 businesses said they are not willing to provide any charge in any scenario.

A majority of businesses would support a uniform charge for disposable food containers.

Of the 58 Berkeley food businesses that responded to the questions regarding disposable food container usage and reduction, 52% said they would not be interested in creating *customer incentives* to reduce disposable food container use and 48% said they would be interested. Busi-



nesses that were amenable to offering an incentive to reduce disposable food container packaging were asked if they would offer a discount to customers that Bring Your Own (BYO) container or charge for the disposable packaging and the findings are as follows:

- Of the 31 responses that indicated they would provide a discount the most frequent discounts were \$0.25, \$0.50 (8 “Yes” Responses for each).
- Of the 18 businesses who indicated they would be willing to charge customers for the use of disposable food ware containers the most frequent charges were \$0.25, \$0.50 (7 “Yes” Responses for each).

As a follow up to Option B, businesses were asked if they would be more interested in providing an

Conclusion

Based on the study results, the general sentiment of food businesses in Berkeley is they would support an effort to address the environmental pollution from disposable food packaging generating too much litter and waste. Most food business operators surveyed (74%) currently use either all disposables or a mix of disposables and reusables. **They support charging for disposable food and beverage packaging if all businesses in the city were required to also charge the same amount** and businesses are even more supportive of this approach to reduce disposable food packaging waste if the money was entirely or partly shared to cover the costs of litter abatement in their district.

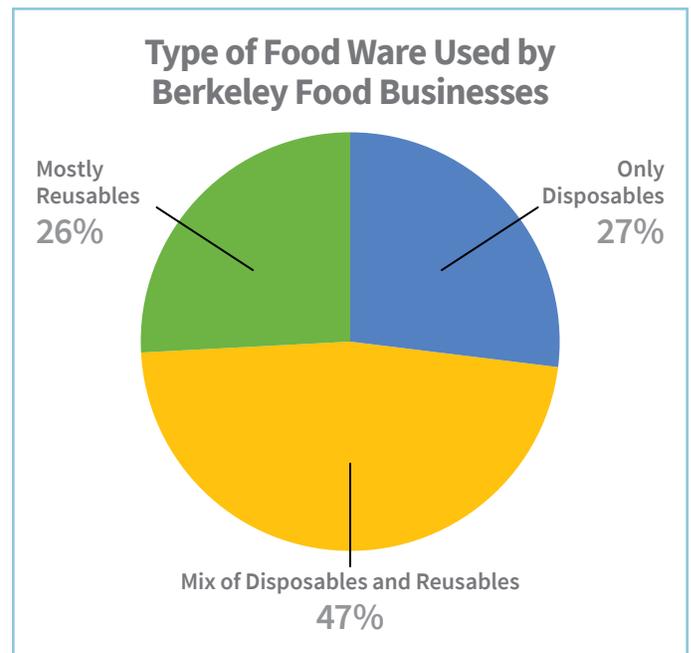
However, 37% of businesses would find it very difficult to change their dine-in operations to include only reusable food ware items due to concerns about additional labor and dishwashing capacity, but increased water usage was not mentioned as a barrier. To reduce the use of disposable cups for take-out, 58% of businesses are willing to charge customers if all businesses are required to charge the same amount. Further-

incentive **if all businesses had to charge the same amount. Of the 53 who responded, 67% said “Yes” they would be, and 33% said “No” they would still not be interested.**

Businesses were asked how they would feel reducing their disposable container use by charging for the packaging. The revenue from this would then be invested into one of the below scenarios:

- All revenue goes to street cleaning (76% “Yes”, 24% “No”, 49 Responses)
- Half of the revenue goes to street cleaning and ½ of revenue the business gets to keep (72% “Yes”, 28% “No”, 46 Responses)
- All revenue is kept by businesses (73% “Yes”, 27% “No”, 47 Responses)

Only 7 businesses said they are not willing to provide any charge in any scenario.



more, 67% of businesses are willing to charge customers for disposable food ware containers if all businesses are required to charge the same amount. It is significant that the majority of businesses will support legislation to charge for disposable cups and food containers so that the use of these items is reduced.

Appendix: Disposable Cup and Container Survey Questions for Businesses

General Concerns:

1. Do you have any of the following concerns with disposable take out foodware?
 - a) It is expensive to offer to customers for free
 - b) It costs me a lot to dispose of the dirty ones
 - c) They produce a lot of street litter
 - d) They are not aesthetically pleasing for customers
 - e) Customers are concerned about potential toxicity
 - f) Customers worry about them polluting the ocean
 - g) Customers are concerned about their recyclability, compostability, or disposal

On-site Service Questions:

2. For guest dining in do you use:
 - a) only disposables
 - b) mostly disposables
 - c) mostly reusables
 - d) only reusables
3. How difficult would it be for you to switch to all reusables?
 - a) Very Easy
 - b) Somewhat Easy
 - c) Somewhat Difficult
 - d) Very Difficult
4. If it is difficult, what are the issues that make it challenging?
 - a) Inadequate dishwashing capacity
 - b) Cost of additional labor
 - c) Theft / Loss of reusables
 - d) Additional costs for reusables
 - e) Cross contamination concerns
 - f) Other _____

To-go Service Questions: Cups

5. Two common incentives suggested for reducing disposable cups are offering a discount for bringing your own cup or charging a fee for a disposable. Would you be interested in creating customer incentives to reduce disposable cups? ___Yes ___No
6. For a BYO cup discount, how much would you be willing to provide:
 - a) \$0.05
 - b) \$0.10
 - c) \$0.25
 - d) \$0.50
 - e) We already offer a discount of \$____
 - f) We would not be interested in offering a discount
7. For a charge on disposable cups, how much would you want to charge?
 - a) \$0.05
 - b) \$0.10
 - c) \$0.25
 - d) \$0.50
 - e) \$0.75
 - f) \$1.00
 - g) We would not be interested in charging a fee

8. Would your interest in charging for a disposable cup increase if all food businesses had to charge the same amount? ___Yes ___No
9. If all businesses in the City were required to charge a fee for disposable hot and cold beverage cups, would you be supportive of this policy if:
- a) All the money went towards keeping the streets clean in this commercial district? ___Yes ___No
 - b) Half of the money went towards keeping the streets clean in this commercial district and you could keep the other half? ___Yes ___No
 - c) You got to keep all the money to cover costs of disposable cups? ___Yes ___No
 - d) No, I wouldn't be at all supportive of charging for disposable cups to my customers.

To-go Service Questions: Food Containers

10. Two common incentives suggested for reducing disposable food containers are offering a discount for bringing your own container or charging a fee for a disposable. Would you be interested in creating customer incentives to reduce disposable food containers? ___Yes ___No
11. For a BYO container discount, how much would you be willing to provide?
- a) \$0.10
 - b) \$0.25
 - c) \$0.50
 - d) \$0.75
 - e) \$1.00
 - f) We would not be interested in offering a discount
12. For a disposable container charge, how much would you want to charge?
- a) \$0.10
 - b) \$0.25
 - c) \$0.50
 - d) \$0.75
 - e) \$1.00
 - f) We would not be interested in charging a fee
13. Would your interest in charging for a disposable container increase if all food businesses had to charge the same amount? ___Yes ___No
14. If all businesses in the City were required to charge for disposable containers, would you be supportive of this if:
- a) All the money went towards keeping the streets clean in this commercial district? ___Yes ___No
 - b) Half of the money went to keeping the streets clean in this commercial district and you could keep the other half? ___Yes ___No
 - c) You got to keep all the money to cover costs of disposable food containers? ___Yes ___No
 - d) No, I wouldn't be supportive of charging for disposable food containers.