

President, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

DAVID CHIU
邱信福
市參事會主席

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Contact: Catherine Rauschuber
catherine.rauschuber@sfgov.org
415.554.7453

San Francisco Board of Supervisors Votes to Phase Out Plastic Bottled Water on City Property

Ordinance Begins to Address Environmental Damage of Excess Plastic in the Waste Stream

San Francisco, CA—The San Francisco Board of Supervisors today voted unanimously to support groundbreaking legislation to phase out the sale and distribution of plastic bottled water on municipal property. The ordinance applies to events, permitted vendors, and lease holders on San Francisco property, as well as City departments themselves.

“The environmental impact of our yearly consumption of billions of plastic water bottles is enormous. Given that San Franciscans can access clean and inexpensive Hetch Hetchy water out of our taps, we need to wean ourselves off our recent addiction to plastic water bottles,” said Chiu. “I hope San Franciscans can again lead the way by drinking water without harming the environment or the bottom line.”

Under the proposal, initially only events that have access to adequate on-site water would be required to comply. All events on City property would fall under the ordinance on October 1, 2016. Foot races and other participant sporting events are excluded. Additionally, new permits and leases on City property would have to include language prohibiting the sale of bottled water at their establishments. As a matter of fairness, the legislation would not apply only to new leases and permits and not to existing lease and permit holders. Departments would be able to grant waivers to events and lease holders under certain circumstances such as to protect public health or safety.

In recognition that people need increased access to tap water, the legislation also requires City government to take action to increase access to water in public places. Where feasible, it requires that drinking fountains, filling stations, and hook-ups for events be installed as part of a renovation in a heavily used public park or plaza. It also asks the City to investigate solutions that would allow events to hook up to the municipal water infrastructure. Further, City departments would no longer be allowed to purchase plastic bottled water with city funds.

This proposal begins to tackle the enormous problem of excess plastic in the waste stream. It gives events, vendors, and permittees on City property adequate time to develop alternatives to selling disposable plastic water bottles. There are already a growing number of cost effective

alternatives to plastic bottled water available, and the number of these will only keep growing.

“Congratulations to Supervisors Chiu and Mar for spearheading this important legislation that helps San Francisco take another step closer to achieving zero waste,” said Joshua Arce, president of the San Francisco Commission on the Environment. “This law will not only help reduce the negative environmental impacts of bottled water, but demonstrates how San Francisco continues to champion legislation that both reduces waste and keeps litter out of our streets and Bay.”

In San Francisco, Recology alone collects 10-15 million single-use plastic water bottles a year, and this does not include the bottles that go to redemption centers or landfill. It is likely that tens of millions of single use water bottles from San Francisco end up in the recycling stream or landfill on an annual basis.

“We applaud Supervisor Chiu and San Francisco’s leadership in the movement to think outside the bottle,” said Katherine Sawyer, Campaign Organizer of Think Outside the Bottle at Corporate Accountability International. “By taking this step, San Francisco continues to be a pioneer, paving the way for cities, states and national parks across the country to follow suit and buck the bottle. Not only does this measure eliminate wasteful spending on such an eco-unfriendly product, but it also opens doors to increased investment in the most essential of municipal services—water.”

“Hetch Hetchy tap water is among the highest quality and best tasting in the nation,” said Harlan Kelly, General Manager of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. “The new legislation will make this great tap water even more easily accessible for people in public spaces.”

"We are surfers and ocean enthusiasts dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of our world's oceans, waves, and beaches, and all too often we witness first-hand the negative impacts plastic bottles have on our beaches and on ocean health," said Scott Coleman, Chair of the San Francisco Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation. “These plastic bottles will never biodegrade, but rather will become part of the food chain as they break apart and are eaten by fish and other species. We support this legislation and thank Supervisor Chiu for his leadership in protecting San Francisco beaches and oceans."

The legislation is co-sponsored by Supervisors Eric Mar and Jane Kim and supported by a broad coalition of environmental organizations and event producers. A second and final vote on the ordinance will take place at the Board meeting next Tuesday, March 11, after which it will be sent to the Mayor for his signature.

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