

# deputation

**Date:** July 10, 2018

**To:** Public Works & Infrastructure Committee

**Re:** PW 31.10 Options to address single-use items,  
misleading advertising and textile waste in the City of Toronto



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Good morning Councillors,

My name is Emily Alfred and I'm the Waste Campaigner for the Toronto Environmental Alliance, or TEA. TEA has been working with residents, workers, businesses and City Hall to build a Greener City for over 30 years.

We've heard from our supporters, and many more Toronto residents and businesses, that they are concerned about waste, about plastic pollution, and want to see our city move towards zero waste and a healthy circular economy.

Products and packaging - especially plastics - cause significant environmental harm, and this is increasing as there are more single-use products and more complicated packaging than ever. When plastics aren't managed properly, they pollute our parks, our ravines, and our waterways. A 2015 study on plastic in the Great Lakes found that 89% of beach litter was plastic.

Packaging still causes problems when people put it in the recycling bin: recycling costs for plastics are going up, and the City is seeing increased contamination when un-recyclable materials are mistakenly put in the Blue Bin. City staff reported in April this could cost an extra \$9M in 2018 alone. Some contamination is a result of confusing labelling - products that appear recyclable, or have a recycling symbol on the bottom, but the City waste calendar says it's not recyclable in Toronto - things like black plastic, small plastics like straws, or coffee pods.

TEA created a letter-writing campaign so that Toronto residents could ask Council to take action on single-use plastics. We collected more than 1400 letters online and at events. (*Some of these were sent directly to councillors by email and to this Committee.*)

But this isn't the first time Torontonians have said this: As this staff report points out, public consultation events over two years on the Long Term Waste Strategy also showed that the public strongly supports action to address problem waste, including by-laws or other mandatory measures.

We also know that this urgent call to act on single use plastics is not just in Toronto. All over the world, people are waking up to the global issue of plastics.

Major companies are taking action: IKEA is phasing out all single use plastics and just yesterday Starbucks announced it's phasing out straws. We've also seen local Toronto businesses giving up straws; changing the types of take out containers they use and pilot test deposit systems for reusable drink cups.

While some businesses are taking action, many aren't.

Regulations to ban, restrict or put a fee on materials are tools, that ensure that all businesses do their part - levelling the playing field so all businesses take responsibility for the materials they promote and distribute.

That's why governments around the world are taking action. Vancouver has banned some forms of plastics. Seattle's ban on straws and plastic cutlery started on July 1st this year, and the European Union has released a directive to ban and restrict many single use plastics in all EU countries.

We need Toronto to act now and look seriously at regulatory tools to deal with problematic single use materials.

Essential to reducing problem materials and contamination is addressing false or misleading labelling and advertising: Currently, companies claim their product is recyclable, or compostable even when their product isn't actually accepted in Toronto's Blue or Green Bins. For example with 'compostable' plastic cups and with some 'recyclable' coffee pods. Sometimes these recycling claims are aggressively promoted in ad campaigns, or with big symbols on the package. This causes confusion and leads to higher waste costs for all of us, more contamination and environmental harm.

We strongly support the staff recommendation to inform companies about their inaccurate recyclability or compostability claims. But the City should go further and consider penalties that can be imposed on those that advertise and label their product in a way that contributes to contamination in Toronto's Blue and Green Bins.

Considering the system of inspections, warnings and fines imposed on single family and multi-residential customers found contaminating the Blue Bin, it is an issue of fairness that the City also look at penalties for producers that contribute to Blue Bin contamination.

**In summary, we have a few recommendations for this committee:**

- Accelerate the timeline - research and consultation should happen as quickly as possible with a report back to Council in early 2019.
- Connect with businesses - Go beyond letters to educate them about the impact of single use products. Use stakeholder consultations to test messaging and to identify how best to support Toronto businesses to phase out problem materials.
- The City can and should immediately look at reducing and eliminating single use products where possible in civic facilities, recreation centres, daycares and senior residences, and in all contracts using City money.
- Pursue legal action and fines for companies that continue to create and promote products that are shown to be pollutants and to cause contamination to city waste streams.

City residents and waste customers are already paying the cost of contamination, higher recycling costs and the cost of litter clean up. The sheer scale of plastic pollution in our environment, and the rising costs of recycling is proof that we need more than goodwill and voluntary efforts.