May 21, 2012

George Shirakawa, President
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
County Government Center, Tenth Floor - East Wing
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Item 9, Restriction of expanded polystyrene food & beverage containers – Support

Dear President Shirakawa,

Californians Against Waste (CAW) strongly supports a ban on disposable food service ware made from expanded polystyrene foam (eps) and other non-recyclable, non-compostable plastics. We respectfully urge you to adopt Ordinance No. NS-517.80 relating to restriction of expanded polystyrene food and beverage containers, at the May 22nd Board meeting.

Polystyrene takeout food packaging is a major—and readily preventable—source of urban litter and marine debris. Light, aerodynamic, and prone to break into small pieces, polystyrene can be easily transported by wind and rain into the marine environment even when “properly” disposed of. Beach cleanup studies show polystyrene to be one of the most common forms of litter. Plastic marine debris pollution has killed thousands of marine birds, sea turtles and other species and threatens California’s 43 billion dollar ocean-based economy.

Recycling of this problem material is not an option. Despite decades of promises from the plastic industry for a comprehensive recycling infrastructure, no widespread recycling scheme for polystyrene has ever been successfully implemented over the long term. Along with limited recycling opportunities, food contamination issues and the lightweight quality of the material make it difficult to successfully recycle expanded polystyrene. It’s also not cost-effective to recycle eps.

It’s time to take a stand against the plastic industry. Dozens of coastal communities have already banned polystyrene. Some, like the City of Berkeley, have been successfully reducing polystyrene litter pollution through such a food packaging ordinance for decades. CAW thanks Santa Clara County for its environmental leadership regarding plastic pollution, and we urge you to continue this leadership by taking action against eps and other non-recyclable, non-compostable food containers.

Sincerely,

Mark Murray
Executive Director

cc: Supervisors Mike Wasserman, Dave Cortese, Ken Yeager, Liz Kniss