



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor
Seattle Public Utilities
Ray Hoffman, Director

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For Immediate Release:

Contact: Dick Lilly
Seattle Public Utilities
Office: 206-615-0706
dick.lilly@seattle.gov

or

Brad Halverson
Vice President, Marketing
Metropolitan Market
Office: 206-923-3723
bhalverson@metropolitan-market.com

New compostable food tray debuts today at Seattle's Metropolitan Markets

Specially developed in response to Seattle ordinance which requires all single-use, throw-away food packaging to be compostable or recyclable by July 1.

SEATTLE — A new product, first of its kind in the world, makes its debut in Seattle today when local chain Metropolitan Market rolls out a new, fully compostable tan tray for meat, fish and poultry sales.

The new type of tray, a “bioplastic” made entirely from corn and not petroleum, was developed by the packaging industry in response to Seattle’s ordinance that requires all single-use food service packaging at quick-serve restaurants and grocery stores to be either compostable or recyclable. The ordinance takes effect July 1.

The new food service packaging requirements mean Seattle will stop sending 6,000 tons of plastic and plastic-coated paper single-use food service ware and leftover food to the landfill in Oregon every year. That’s the equivalent of eliminating 225 shipping containers of waste, or a garbage train more than 100 cars long.

“This is a revolutionary step to cut down on landfill waste, and we’re delighted to be the first supermarket we know of worldwide to adopt the system,” said Brad Halverson, vice president of marketing at Metropolitan Market. “Our Seattle customers will now be able to redirect an estimated one million meat trays per year—about five 53-foot trailers full—into compost.”

“The brown-toned tray clearly looks different from the old white and black plastic foam containers now prohibited in Seattle. The tan color will help residents know that they can put this tray in their food and yard waste carts,” said Dick Lilly, waste prevention manager for Seattle Public Utilities.

The new bioplastic foam trays were developed by food service packaging suppliers and

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Seattle Municipal Tower, 49th Floor, 700 Fifth Avenue, Seattle WA 98104-5004

Tel: (206) 684-5851, TTY/TDD (206) 233-7241, FAX: (206) 684-4631

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distributors Kenco and BunzlR3 working with the manufacturer, Pactiv. They are being marketed under the name EarthChoice.

“Switching from petroleum-based plastic foam to bioplastic reduces green house gas generation at the same time composting the new trays means less waste,” said Lilly. Seattle banned “Styrofoam” products from restaurant use January 1, 2009. The city’s ordinance gave the grocery industry 18 months more to develop a compostable alternative for meat trays. None existed when the city’s law was passed.

“The packaging industry has stepped up and created new products that make it possible to really reduce waste in the food service business,” Lilly said. In addition to the new meat trays at Metropolitan Market, in the next week customers can expect to see similar brown-toned meat and fish trays at QFC and Fred Meyer stores. A variety of new, compostable food service ware is also already appearing in many Seattle quick-serve restaurants, he said.

“Making it easy for consumers to recognize compostable food packaging by its tan color will help prevent contamination in the waste stream,” said Susan Thoman, director of sales and marketing for Cedar Grove Composting. All approved compostable products, along with food and yard waste, are delivered to Cedar Grove Composting. The compost is later used as soil amendment in local parks and gardens.

Seattle, closely followed by Issaquah later this year, is the first market area in the U.S. to require that single-use food service packaging be either compostable or recyclable. Similar but less comprehensive regulations for single-use food service packaging are being tried in San Francisco and Toronto.

The up-front cost of compostable meat trays is less than twice what “Styrofoam” trays cost, but the difference per item is just pennies, according to Kenco spokesman Howard Knopf. It’s about 2 cents per tray for small trays, 8 cents for large “family pack” trays. The cost difference between compostable products and the plastic or plastic-coated paper food service products they replace is dropping steadily, he said.

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