



Mitty Advocacy Project

Archbishop Mitty High School, Diocese of San José

5000 Mitty Way, San Jose, CA 95129 | Phone: 408 - 252 - 6610

A Youth Response to Ocean Pollution

Environmental Legislation Proposal

- As teenagers living in Silicon Valley, near the Pacific Ocean, we understand the significance of biodiversity and various ecosystems in our community.
- Living by the coast, we have observed the instrumental part fishing has to play in our local economy. Our friends and family consume a large amount of fish, making it frightening to learn the impact of pollution on fish populations and on our health as consumers.

A Catholic Perspective on Environmental Justice

- The Catholic perspective follows the belief that we are considered stewards over this planet and should care for our environment. We should care for the land that will be used by future generations, especially being that we only have one earth.
- *Laudato Si*, an encyclical published by Pope Francis, describes how all beings on this earth must care for each other and the resources we partake of; the Pope warns us that if we continue recklessly wasting and misusing resources, we soon will have nothing left to survive. He urges us to be more aware of the waste we generate and take concrete actions to reduce the amount of waste we are emitting in the future.

The Problem

Polystyrene and other non-recyclable plastics are a serious but preventable source of marine debris pollution. Many of these products are both lightweight and aerodynamic, so they are easily blown into gutters and storm drains even when "properly" disposed of. They are also very brittle, so when littered, they quickly break into smaller and smaller pieces, making cleanup almost impossible. Once degraded in marine environments, many of these products can kill fish and other wildlife because they resemble food and cause choking or starvation if ingested, and the amount of plastic disposed of is so great that one study found 25% of fish in California contained plastic.

In addition to these plastics, food containers are also highly responsible for a large portion of litter contaminating our environment. An annual report by International Coast Cleanup found that the most commonly littered items of beaches are now foam food containers, which are very dangerous to marine life. And the impact of these are huge; when 23 US National Parks banded together to ban





plastic bottles at concession stands, a park service study found that they had prevented 111,743 lb of plastic from being dumped into landfills or littered on park ground.

Furthermore, the presence of plastic harms our own health and economy. A study conducted by Carleton University found that DEHP—a toxic carcinogen linked to birth defects, immune system problems, and abnormal childhood development—is routinely found in the bodies of marine animals. As the amount of plastic only increases with time, the amount of money lost on productivity and health issues will exceed the amount of money needed to use recyclable or compostable materials.

MAP's Solution

We suggest that the California State Senate Bill 1335 be implemented on the national level in order to divert plastic in waterways and marine life. SB 1335: *Solid waste: food service packaging: state agencies, facilities, and property* by Senate member Ben Allen was signed into law on September 20, 2018, and it will take effect in California on January 1, 2021. The bill mandates that government-funded food service providers use only recyclable and compostable food packaging at various state facilities.

By passing such a bill, the federal government would authorize national food service facilities to switch from harmful solid plastics that take around 450 years to decompose, to a biodegradable solution. This would reduce the rate of human pollution on the environment by remedying the areas in which mass amounts of plastic are disposed. Furthermore, clearing litter build-up—15% of which is made up by polystyrene alone, according to a study by the California Department of Transportation—is extremely expensive. According to the City of Los Angeles, repairing impaired waterways, in part due to litter pollution, will cost more than \$1 billion.

As the youth and future of this country, we will all be affected by the decisions made by the leaders today. Thus we propose a multi-step approach to prevent further ocean pollution and to move toward a more sustainable future. The approach would start with the removal of all single-use plastic in food packaging at all military base cafeterias and food concessions. Many kids our age are currently serving in these military bases and as youth, we know they would want to fight for a healthy planet, one where plastic pollution has not contaminated our oceans beyond repair.

Military bases' use of plastic is considerably less compared to other government-operated facilities, so it will have a smaller impact, but implementing this policy on a smaller scale like this will definitely provide valuable experience on techniques and strategies to use. Once we have established this policy in military bases, we can then transition to federally controlled parks and beaches, as they are some of our closest contacts with nature and the oceans, and as studies have shown, previous efforts to limit the sale of food and beverages in plastic containers at some of these locations have been very effective, leading to significant reductions in the amount of plastic waste that is generated.

Altogether, by following in the footsteps of California, our country can start to take the critical steps necessary to protect our oceans and move toward a more sustainable future.

