



FOODWARE AWARE

REUSE. CHOOSE. REFUSE.

Public Guide to Foodware Ordinance

The County of San Mateo and many local cities within the county adopted the Disposable Food Service Ware Ordinance to reduce single-use plastics and other foodware waste, improve health and safety of our community members, and keep our waterways clean and safe.

You may see some changes in foodware and operations at your favorite restaurants because of this new law. Use this guide to understand the changes and see how you can be part of this important effort!



USE REUSABLES!

Food facilities are **encouraged** to use reusable instead of disposable foodware.

Actions YOU can take:

- Bring and use your own reusables (utensils, straws, to-go mugs, leftover containers, etc.) instead of single-use disposables when visiting coffee shops, restaurants, food festivals, and other food facilities that use disposable foodware.
- Talk or send a letter to your favorite food business to encourage them to use reusables.



CHOOSE FIBER-BASED!

Food facilities are **required** to use natural fiber-based, compostable materials (e.g., paper, sugarcane, bamboo, etc.).

Actions YOU can take:

- Talk or send a letter to your favorite food business to encourage them to be plastic-free and switch to compliant compostable fiber-based foodware, or even better, to reusables.
- Properly sort and dispose of foodware (check your local recycling and composting hauler/facility's guidelines).



REFUSE PLASTIC!

Plastic is **not allowed** for most disposable foodware and foodware accessories must be requested.

Actions YOU can take:

- Refuse single-use plastic foodware when offered by restaurants and other food facilities. Inform them that they should be using plastic-free foodware for most items.
- Request disposable accessories like straws, stirrers, napkins, and condiment packets only when you need them.
- Take only what you need at self-serve stations and dispensers.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Why are restaurants, cafes, and other food businesses changing their foodware?

They are complying with the new local foodware law that will help prevent plastic pollution and reduce unnecessary foodware waste.

Why do I have to request utensils, straws, and other side items?

In the past, customers were given utensils, napkins, condiment packets and other “accessory” items that they didn’t want or need. These items often end up on our streets, beaches, and waterways. So, they are being proactive and only giving out these items when you, the consumer, specifically request it.

Why are small items like utensils and napkins no longer bundled together?

By not bundling these small items together, food businesses are making sure that you only receive the items you need while ensuring items that you don’t need are not wasted.

Why aren’t they using compostable plastics?

Since compostable plastics (aka bioplastics, PLA) look like traditional plastics, they are often sorted improperly and sent to the landfill. Even when sent to the composting facility, many do not properly break down into usable compost. Compostable plastics also pose the same threats to wildlife and the health of the environment as traditional plastics because they do not break down into compost in water or on the street (if littered).

Why do I still see detachable plastic lids on beverage cups and food containers?

Under the current law, detachable beverage and food container lids are not required to be made from natural fiber. Since many food businesses provide grab-and-go food options, the lids will need to be transparent (so plastic) to allow you to see what you may be buying. Also, many plastic lids provide a more secure lock on the food container/cup than the natural fiber alternatives.

Are there issues with allergies & fiber-based items? specifically those made from wheat stalks?

No. Disposable foodware made from wheat is reported to be made from the stalk or stem of wheat plants and not made from the grain, which is the cause of allergic reactions.

If you have any additional questions, or need any assistance, contact the Foodware Aware Team.

 www.smcsustainability.org/food-ware

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