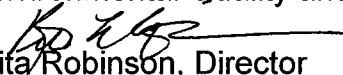


**CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE**

Date: August 3, 2005

To: Honorable Councilmember Ed P. Reyes, Chair
Ad Hoc Committee for the Los Angeles River

Honorable Councilmember Jan Perry, Chair
Environmental Quality and Waste Management Committee

From: 
Rita Robinson, Director
Bureau of Sanitation

Subject: **LOS ANGELES RIVER PLASTICS INDUSTRY TASK FORCE – FINAL REPORT**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented herein are the following recommendations of the Task Force for consideration and approval by City Council:

Authorize the Task Force to build on the collaboration that has been established between the City, the plastic bag industry, advocacy groups, and the business sector and to

1. Support the establishment of an "Adopt-a-River Program" to secure non-governmental financial assistance with needed clean ups, maintenance, education, and improvements in the River, and instruct the City Administrative Officer (CAO), Chief Legislative Analyst (CLA), and the City Attorney to assess possible funding mechanisms for the program.
2. Establish a uniform City-wide public education message and anti-litter effort for plastic bags, leveraging private and agency resources and using the Los Angeles River watershed as the "hook" or basis for the campaign.
3. Implement a pilot anti-litter program in partnership with City in identified trash hot spot areas in the city to assess the integration of engineered solutions (screens and inserts) with public education.
4. Foster market development for recycled plastic bags through City and government-led efforts.

These four recommendations should be established together, as an overall multi-disciplinary package, to promote synergy and achieve better results in the overall goal of reducing or eliminating plastic from the River.

TRANSMITTALS

- 1: Lists of Task Force Members and Other Interested Parties / Stakeholders
- 2: Summary / Highlights of Task Force and Subcommittee Meetings

3: Map, "High Trash Generation Areas"

INTRODUCTION

Plastics are an issue for all of Los Angeles. While plastic products are integral to our lifestyle and economy, some of the unintended consequences arising from their use span the issues of litter, waste disposal/landfills, recycling, stormwater, and the environment. For the Los Angeles River (River), plastics are a critical element in the City's revitalization efforts. Plastic bags are the River's graffiti. It is recognized that the solutions to this growing problem will need to be multi-faceted -- no one solution will be the "magic bullet."

This report documents the work of the Los Angeles River Plastics Industry Task Force (Task Force) to identify potential remedies to the problem of plastic litter in the River. Overall, the Task Force has fostered a spirit of cooperation among the involved parties who acknowledge we face a serious environmental problem and share a common desire to implement workable, mutually beneficial solutions. Presented herein are the following recommendations of the Task Force for consideration and approval by City Council:

BACKGROUND

The confluence of River-related issues - that plastic is a significant component of the trash, and the ongoing work by the Watershed Protection Division to achieve compliance with trash regulations and by the Solid Resources Program to meet established diversion and recycling goals - created the environment in which the City found itself desiring to respond with an innovative and integrated approach.

Plastic Litter in the River

Noting the significant plastic bag litter from the April 2003 La Gran Limpieza, the Great Los Angeles River CleanUp, Councilmember Ed Reyes introduced the Plastic Bag motion to address the issue. As the motion made its way through council, staff from Council District 1 met with Friends of the Los Angeles River (FoLAR) and began documenting trash in the River to assess the impact of plastic bags. The council office requested the Bureau of Sanitation's (BOS) participation to assist in several waste sorts, starting with the 2004 Great Los Angeles River CleanUp. In June 2004, the BOS also characterized trash collected from storm drain catch basins. The results of the two trash sorts showed that plastics, predominantly plastic bags, constitute the single greatest component of urban litter in the River. In response, on February 9, 2005, the Los Angeles City Council passed a motion directing the creation of a Los Angeles River Plastics Industry Task Force to provide recommendations on solutions for this growing environmental concern. The motion directed that the BOS lead this effort in conjunction with other City departments and the plastics industry, and to report in 60 days to the Ad Hoc River Committee and the Environmental Quality and Waste Management Committee on the Task Force's findings regarding plastic bags, polystyrene, and plastic bottles.

Current City Plastic Bag Recycling Efforts

The Solid Resources Support Services Division (SRSSD) of BOS continues to expand the recyclables market for plastic bags. In a joint effort between SRSSD and all five City-contracted material recovery facilities (MRF), and with the support of plastics manufacturers, in April 2005 plastic bags became the latest recyclable commodity that can be deposited in the City's single-family blue curbside recycling bins. The inclusion of plastic bags is another step towards the City's goal of 70% landfill diversion and continued compliance with Assembly Bill 939. However, the single-family curbside recycling program collects only 33% of the material going to landfills. A pilot program is underway to service multi-unit residences to increase recycling throughout the City. There is some commercial recycling of plastic, but it is not consistent across industries or regions.

Since curbside collection services only a portion of the City's population, the Task Force also took under consideration opportunities for City-wide plastic bag recycling and public education aimed at reducing plastic litter and increasing diversion from the waste stream.

Regulatory Drivers

The movement to reduce and recycle plastic litter coincides with the enactment of new regulatory mandates to clean the environment. Through the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) regulations are being imposed to improve water quality. A TMDL establishes the maximum amount of a specified pollutant, such as trash and bacteria, that can be discharged into a water body without causing it to become impaired. Trash TMDLs for the River and the Ballona Creek and Wetlands were adopted in August 2002. Compliance points for the River include a 20% reduction of trash by 2005 and a 50% reduction by 2008. The City also has a self-imposed mandate to achieve 70% solid waste diversion by 2020. The ability to contribute to these reductions was incorporated into the Task Force's criteria to evaluate proposed solutions for reducing the amount of plastic litter in the River. More than 60 TMDLs for the Los Angeles region will be adopted within 13 years, many of them specifically targeting the River.

At the same time, other municipalities in California have been taking their own steps to address the plastic litter issue. Earlier this year, the City of San Francisco considered a proposal to impose a \$0.17 fee on every plastic bag. While it is uncertain if a fee program will be approved, it underscores the point that plastic litter is a widespread concern and the lengths to which communities are seeking relief. Locally, the City of Malibu is expected to ban grocery stores, restaurants, and other food outlets from using expanded polystyrene food packaging, such as plastic foam cups and clamshell to-go boxes. The ordinance to enact this ban is scheduled for adoption by the Malibu City Council in August 2005.

FORMATION OF THE TASK FORCE

The stated purpose of the Task Force was to investigate viable solutions that prevent plastic, specifically plastic bags and polystyrene as the initial priorities, from blighting local waterways. The goals were to focus on the Los Angeles River watershed, the impact upon it by plastic and polystyrene, and to deliver a set of recommendations that the City Council can review and approve. To attain the

highest level of quality input, the process was kept flexible and open for meaningful discussion, and without any predetermined outcomes. In order to facilitate discussion and focus on specific areas, 23 members were selected, consisting of a cross-section of representatives from industries that manufacture or distribute plastic bags and polystyrene products, waste and recycling interests, City staff, and environmental and Los Angeles River watershed advocacy groups. Several of the manufacturers are also members of the Progressive Bag Alliance (PBA), a coalition of the leading manufacturers of plastic retail bags in the United States. PBA members include Vanguard Plastics, Hilex Poly, Intoplast, Advance Polybag, and Super Bag. These manufacturers supply the major retail and grocery stores throughout California. The PBA was formed to create increased plastic bag recycling opportunities, facilitate programs to reduce the use of plastic bags, and to assist in the development of public education anti-litter programs. Other interested parties/stakeholders were kept apprised of the work of the Task Force and given opportunities to present information/perspectives that they wanted to share for consideration. Task Force members and the interested parties/stakeholders are listed in Attachment 1.

The benefits of working directly with the plastic bag industry are recognized. During one of the first Task Force meetings, FoLAR discussed their upcoming La Gran Limpieza and decided to use the event to highlight the problem of plastic bags in the River and to examine their recyclability. In quick order, the PBA produced special bags for the clean up and helped coordinate a trial recovery and recycling effort. The pilot project was testimony to good collaboration as demonstrated by the joint work of SRSSD staff, the PBA, Waste Management, and the City's contractor, City Fibers. However, the Task Force learned that the recovered plastic bags were not recyclable. The total trash pulled from the River during both days weighed in at close to 30 tons compared to last year's collection record of 25 tons of refuse. FoLAR also received a \$5,000 contribution towards the CleanUp from the PBA. On the market development side, City Fibers began working with referrals provided by the manufacturers who offer more competitive prices to recycle the City's film plastic.

TASK FORCE SUMMARY

A series of four working sessions, beginning with the kickoff meeting on March 31, 2005, was held to step the Task Force through the process of exploring alternatives and developing its recommendations. Additional sub-group meetings were held when necessary. Plastic bags were the focus of these first working sessions and additional sessions for polystyrene will be begin in August 2005. Highlights from each of the meetings are described in Attachment 2.

Through a brainstorming process, a broad range of ideas was first identified. Then a set of goals and evaluation criteria were agreed upon and used to evaluate the brainstormed ideas. This process narrowed the list to a set of proposed solutions that were thought to be effective, targeted, collaborative, and visible as follows:

PUBLIC EDUCATION

River-specific

- Targeted-area consumer education program (clean ups, events, school participation, etc.)

City-wide

- Messages printed on bags (corporate-led)
- Consumer education program (Industry and City-sponsored)
- City's Fats, Oil, and Grease (FOG) program – opportunity to use existing system for education

PROGRAM

River-specific

- "Adopt-a-River" Program focusing on clean ups, events, maintenance, school and public education, and improvements for the River

City-wide

- City curbside collection program that includes plastic bags – support/expand existing program
- Voluntary retail bag take-back program
- Mandatory retail bag take-back program
- Buy-back centers to take plastic bags
- FOG program to include plastic bags

The consensus was that proposing a set of voluntary, interconnected set of solutions should be explored and implemented in the short term (next 3-5 years) to ascertain their overall effectiveness. Other regulatory mechanisms, such as a mandatory take-back, a fee on bags, or a ban, may be considered if these voluntary programs, in partnership with Industry, are proven to not adequately help the City address its goals.

The Task Force found that these remaining proposals would require more exploration to determine their feasibility in the City. Task Force members worked in several sub-committees to investigate bringing these proposals to fruition.

On May 23, 2005, the BOS, serving as the lead City agency on the Task Force, presented an oral progress report to the Ad Hoc River Committee. Industry representatives on the Task Force also expressed their support of the group's work.

FUNDING

A subcommittee was convened to review possible funding mechanisms for an "Adopt-a-River" Program. Some of the mechanisms discussed include:

1. Create a trust account in the City for a specific purpose - this usually requires a trust ordinance and specific oversight by a department.
2. Donate money to an established non-profit that will provide the services addressed by the Task Force.

3. Use an established foundation that could act as a checkbook for identified needs and receive oversight from a City/Industry board.
4. Establish a foundation specifically for the River to fund clean ups, improvements, and education that is set up to accept tax-deductible donations from businesses.

Establishing special assessment districts and other long-term solutions could be explored, but it is assumed the City's new River Revitalization team will examine these structures. Thus, the focus of the Task Force will be on what can be implemented in the near-term. As part of the recommendations, City staff would like to have the CLA and CAO assist with the assessment of these mechanisms to determine the best fit and benefit for the public, the River, and the business sector.

DETAILS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force evaluated the proposed solutions with respect to their expected contributions toward the group's goals. The Task Force has identified several measures it believes will have good success, and recommends that they be put into action as an integrated program with BOS' recycling and watershed protection efforts to improve the health of the River by reducing plastic litter and increasing its diversion in a convenient manner. The recommendations comprise the basic components of the program and are substantive enough to merit the continued development of detailed strategies. The following recommended proposals build upon the collaborative relationships that are being established between the City, the plastics industry, watershed and recycling advocates, and the business sector, create accountability and uniformity, provide for visible successes, have flexibility to grow and adapt, and allow for milestones and specific timelines:

1. "Adopt-a-River" Program

Targeting high trash areas of the River from the 210 Freeway (North) to Boyle Heights (South), the goal will be to reduce plastic litter by 50%. The City and Industry will create a timeline to meet the 50% goal within the City's TMDL compliance deadlines. It will encompass the physical clean up of identified hot spots and the natural bottom sections of the River, and provide a mechanism and funding for ongoing maintenance, security, community events, and promotion of the River. In order to maximize and leverage investment, this program will be linked to and coordinated with the public education/social marketing campaign (proposed recommendation #2). The program will start in a targeted geographic area to assure initial success with the support of the plastic bag industry. The Task Force envisions that over the long run, this program should be shaped to eventually expand to include the entire River corridor, the broader watershed, and to include support from a wide range of industries and businesses. This is a long-term program to fund the ongoing needs and amenities necessary to revitalize the River and create a vibrant community asset. Once the City Council approves the concept, the Task Force members and City staff can work with the CLA, CAO, and the City Attorney's office to work out the details of the funding mechanisms to establish the program. The Task Force can also work on a strategic business plan that will address specific measurable outcomes, timelines, budgets, and phasing or priorities of implementation.

