

Green To Go Frequently Asked Questions

What is Green to Go?

The Green To Go ordinance requires food and beverages prepared for immediate consumption and to-go must be placed in packaging that is reusable, recyclable or compostable. Recyclable materials to be recycled. Compostable plastic to be composted.

Green to Go Exemptions end April 22, 2019

The Minneapolis Health Department is holding a public meeting to discuss Green To Go product exemptions and to take public comments.

Early in 2018, The Minneapolis Health Department made the determination the Green To Go product exemptions would end April 22, 2019.

After April 22, 2019, these products will no longer be exempt:

- Polyethylene (PE) lined paper hot and cold cups and containers for liquids (soup, etc.), and
- Rigid polystyrene lids for those containers. The containers are marked with a #6 inside three chasing arrows.

The public meeting is:

Monday, January 28

9 to 11 a.m.

Eastside Neighborhood Services

1700 2nd Street NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413

If you cannot attend the public meeting, email or mail your comments to the Health Department.

Email comments to Daniel.Huff@minneapolismn.gov or mail them to:

Minneapolis Health Department

Attn: Dan Huff

250 South 4th St, Room 510

Minneapolis, MN 55415

Submit comments by January 31, 2019.

For reasonable accommodations or alternative formats please contact (add your information here including: department, contact person, phone and email). People who are deaf or hard of hearing can use a relay service to call 311 at 612-673-3000. TTY users call 612-673-2157 or 612-673-2626. Para asistencia 612-673-2700 - Rau kev pab 612-673-2800 - Hadio aad Caawimaad u baahantahay 612-673-3500.


What is immediate consumption?

Immediate consumption is food packaged on-site that is intended to be consumed immediately or taken to go that does not need any additional preparation.

What is polystyrene?

Polystyrene is commonly found in two forms: expanded and rigid.

Expanded polystyrene is a lightweight foam product (Styrofoam™).

Rigid polystyrene is a plastic, often found in black or clear. It is marked with a #6 inside the three chasing arrows symbol. 

Both expanded polystyrene foam and rigid polystyrene plastic are not allowed under the ordinance unless the product is exempted from the ordinance.

Are any products exempt from the ordinance?

- Plastic films less than 10 mils thick. 10 mils is about the thickness of two-and-a-half sheets of paper.
- Foods prepackaged by the manufacturer, producer or distributor

What about utensils, straws and stir sticks?

These products are not packaging. They do not need to be reusable, recyclable or compostable.

What packaging is recyclable?

Recyclable packaging includes: glass bottles, aluminum cans and some plastic food and beverage packaging. Preferable plastic packaging is:

- Polyethylene Terephthalate (#1 PET or PETE)
- High Density Polyethylene (#2 HDPE)
- Polypropylene (#5 PP)
- Clean aluminum foil or pans. If aluminum foil or pans are dirty, they are trash.

What products are reusable and returnable?

Food or beverage containers or packages that can be refilled at a retail location or returned to the distributor for reuse at least once as a container for the same food or beverage. Includes: water bottles, growlers, milk containers and bulk product packaging.

What compostable products are acceptable?

- Products which are BPI certified, Cedar Grove certified, or meet ASTM standard D6868.
- Unlined paper

BPI - Biodegradable Products Institute <http://www.bpiworld.org/BPI-Public/Program.html>

Cedar Grove - <https://cedar-grove.com/compostable/compostability-testing>

ATSM - American Society for Testing and Materials <http://www.astm.org/>

Are products marked degradable, bio-degradable, oxo-degradable, earth friendly, acceptable?

No. Items labeled as biodegradable, oxo-degradable, degradable, earth friendly, or other “green” sounding terms are not compostable. These products fragment into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic, which at this time cannot be removed from the environment.

Compostable products need to be BPI certified or meet ASTM standards D6400 or D6868 standards to comply with the City of Minneapolis Green To Go ordinance.

Confusing Packaging

Beware of packaging that does not meet Green To Go requirements. Some of the products are beige and resemble compostable containers. The symbol on the products is a number six inside three chasing arrows. That symbol means the product is polystyrene and does not meet Green To Go requirements.

Terms such as “green alternative,” “degradable,” “biodegradable,” and “sustainably sourced” are marketing terms. They do not mean a product meets Green to Go requirements.

Do catering companies have to comply with Green To Go?

Catering companies licensed by the City of Minneapolis, another city or the state do not have to comply with Green To Go. If a restaurant also offers catering, the restaurant needs to comply with the ordinance, but the catering business is not required to comply.

Are any businesses exempt from the ordinance?

Hospitals and nursing homes are exempt. They do not need to comply with the ordinance.

Why are plastics #1, 2, and 5 preferred?

There is a robust market for these plastics.

If polystyrene cannot be used, why do I still find foam packaging and #6 plastic containers?

The ordinance applies to food prepared for immediate consumption and packaged on-site. Product packaged by a manufacturer or at an off-site commissary might be in non-compliant packaging or containers. Examples of products that might be found in non-complaint packaging are:

- Raw meat
- A whole rotisserie chicken
- A whole sheet cake

Why does leftover food need to be emptied out of recyclable containers?

Food scraps contaminate recyclable products. Too much food contamination can result in a load of recyclable material being rejected by the recycling company. In that case, the material is not recycled. The material is disposed of as trash.

How do I make a complaint if I receive food in a foam (Styrofoam™) container?

Call 311 or send an email to minneapolis311@minneapolismn.gov. Businesses are allowed to use up existing supplies of non-compliant products.

What are the plastic acronyms?

HDPE - High Density Polyethylene, plastic #2. Commonly used for milk and detergent bottles.

PE – Polyethylene is a plastic coating used on some paper food-service items (for example cups, soup bowls, to-go containers, etc.) PE lined paper products are not recyclable or compostable and should be placed in the trash.


PET/PETE - Polyethylene Terephthalate, plastic #1. Commonly used for beverage bottles. Plastic sauce containers, cups, and clamshells are commonly made with PET or PP

What are the plastic acronyms? (cont.)

PLA - Poly lactic acid. Compostable plastic made from corn or other renewable resource. Paper products lined with PLA plastic that meet the ASTM D6868 standard are fully compostable.

PP – Polypropylene, plastic #5. Plastic sauce containers, cups, and clamshells are commonly made with PP, PET, or PS plastic. Yogurt cups, cottage cheese, sour cream and butter and margarine tubs are several household items commonly made out of PP plastic.

PS – Polystyrene - Commonly found in two forms: expanded and rigid.

Expanded polystyrene is a lightweight foam product. Rigid polystyrene is a plastic, often found as black or clear plastic. It is marked with the #6 in three chasing arrows sym 

What if a building does not have room for an additional dumpster for recycling or organics collection?

Some buildings have a small loading dock or trash collection area. The city is working with building owners to allow them time to work out solutions to trash, recycling, and organics collection issues. Some businesses may need to use recyclable containers and delay adding compostable containers until their building's trash collection area is able to accommodate additional dumpsters.

If you do not control the waste and recycling system at the building (ex. multi-use building), contact the property manager/owner to discuss necessary changes to the system for compliance with Green To Go.

Contact Hennepin County for free signs and additional information about business recycling programs. Hennepin County offers on-site assistance, and grants to add or improve recycling and organics recycling programs. Visit www.hennepin.us/businessrecycling for more information.

Questions about Green To Go?

Contact 311 (outside of Minneapolis call 612-673-3000) or minneapolis311@minneapolismn.gov