



For Immediate Release  
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Welcome to Earth Month 2022!

In a month when Clean Fairfax is contacted daily by local elected officials, residents, schools, houses of worship, and businesses about how to clean up the endless supply of plastic and polystyrene litter in their communities, yesterday, we were graced with a topical Executive Order from the Governor.

At first glance, the Governor's new Executive Order (EO-17) seems to have its heart in the right place. It speaks to the importance of recycling and reducing waste, including food waste, and promoting composting. These are all things we are in favor of and promote—when done right! Go Environment!

But our enthusiasm wanes for this Executive Order when we read “investing in new technologies” to “recycle” plastics. We've seen this veiled language before, with the “Great Chemical Conversion Capex of 2021” or, also known as, the “The Great Polystyrene Compromise of 2021”. Thanks to our very own Northern Virginia legislators, we have lost another 5+ years on a smart and hard-won polystyrene (food Styrofoam) ban that would have gone into effect next year for big fast-food chains like Chik-fi-La and KFC. These fast-food entities saw record breaking profits over the last two years. Why are we giving them more time to pollute when they have shown they can comply with good environmental policy in other states, such as Maryland who banned food polystyrene three years ago, without going bankrupt on switching food containers?

Executive Order 17 is an engraved invitation for petrochemical companies, with the backing of private equity firms like the [Carlyle Group \(Governor Youngkin's employer before he became Governor\)](#) to develop new facilities in Virginia on the taxpayers' dime. Multiple references to “new clean energy jobs” and “new clean technology jobs” are a dog whistle to the advanced recycling industry. This industry has already fleeced Virginia taxpayers for a minimum of \$215,000 for a Braven Environmental facility that is no longer going to be built. If these polluting plastic to fuel “recycling” facilities are built in rural areas where there are already challenges with infrastructure, the folks who live there will have to deal with truck traffic plus worse air and water quality—all in the name of a cleaner environment? Or is this what the kids today call ‘a feature, not a bug?’ Economic development and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive, y'all.

Research indicates that approximately 30% of waste sent to landfills and other facilities is organic and can be composted. We absolutely support getting this waste out of those facilities and into organic composting facilities where it can do some good. But it is not clear to us that this administration is aware that Food Rescue exists and does incredible work here in Virginia, already diverting thousands of pounds of usable food to hungry families and food pantries every single week. The irony of this administration

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having not yet signed HB587, which would provide breakfast and lunch to hungry school kids, now touting the magic of giving them expiring food from restaurants and country clubs, is not lost on us either.

We were dismayed (however, not surprised) at the very end of this poorly written Executive Order, almost as a PS (or an FU) eliminating last year's EO-77 (Governor Northam's surprise order that phased out single use plastics in government agencies, buildings, offices, state parks, colleges, and universities). In less than a year, most Virginia colleges and universities have already transitioned away from single use plastic and have used last year's EO as a rallying cry for sustainability moving forward on their college campuses. We have faith that these institutes of higher learning will not slide backward but, will they be forced to purchase single use plastics after their investment in sustainability? We call upon the Universities with campuses in our own Northern VA region—University of Virginia, George Mason, Virginia Tech, and the Northern Virginia Community College campuses to pledge to stay the course!

Here's the thing, industry professionals and environmentalists alike have been singing the same song for years—we cannot recycle our way out of this crisis—the plastic pollution nightmare has microplastics found in drinking water, our food, our blood, and in our lungs. The only solution to less plastic in our environment is, not surprisingly, less plastic. While microplastics and the universality of plastic pollution is daunting, we think turning more plastic into a toxic soup of fossil fuels and calling it “recycling” is the real, scary reality that the Executive Order sets the stage for.

The solution to the plastic pollution crisis is source reduction; we need to stop producing and using so much disposable plastic. Plastic isn't inherently evil, of course, and recycling isn't a useless endeavor, but pinning all the hopes of a better environment on recycling is a false solution that props up oil industry profits while individuals and communities suffer economically and environmentally.

Finally, we cannot go backwards when we have made actual gains on eliminating single use plastics from the state's institutions—it simply doesn't make sense, and it will cost taxpayers money in both actual costs and costs in dealing with ... you guessed it— all that plastic pollution.

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