



The Trailblazer

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Governor Cuomo's 2020 Styrofoam Ban

By John Szalasny

New York State is starting to understand why the plastic crisis matters. Governor Cuomo proposed expansion of the bottle bill in 2019 to include more beverages to improve recycling rates. In 2020, he will be proposing a state-wide Styrofoam ban to take effect in 2022.

As most of you know, in January, 2018, China placed a ban on the imports of plastic waste. Their "National Sword Campaign" has upended the global recycling industry. This affected our local municipal recycling programs, with many eliminating the collections of unmarketable #3-7 plastics. These are now being added to the 90% of plastics produced that are not being recycled. The Sierra Club Niagara Group has supported local efforts to ban Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) foam containers, more commonly known by the trademark name Styrofoam®.

Takeout containers are a universally unrecyclable product due to the food contamination issue. Even virgin Styrofoam used in packaging is uneconomical to recycle as it is cheaper to produce from fossil fuels than to use recycled materials. EPS foams make up about 30% by volume of the garbage that we landfill every year. And they do not degrade in a landfill setting. Add to this the health issues with the manufacture and use of EPS foams, and you can see this is a topic that needs serious attention.

Dow Chemical Corp. introduced Styrofoam products in the United States in 1954. In 2016,

Americans threw away 25 BILLION Styrofoam® cups, enough to circle the earth 436 times. Add in an equally staggering number of clam shell containers, trays to display grocery store meats, egg containers (not to mention the Styrofoam used in packaging). And remember, that unless it has been recycled or burned, that all of the petroleum-based plastics ever produced still exist today. This adds up to a mountain of trash that threatens to bury us.

The Governor's proposal appears to mirror the Styrofoam ban in New York City which went into effect on January 1, 2019. Local communities like the City of Buffalo and Village of East Aurora are currently considering local bans. The Sierra Club Niagara Group supports both the Governor's proposal as well as continued efforts to pass local Styrofoam food packaging bans. If you would like to join in these efforts or would like help to start a ban in your hometown, please email me at sierraniagara.john@gmail.com. Like the Facebook group [Bring NYC's Styrofoam Ban to My Hometown!](#) which was set up as a resource for our local efforts and focuses on issues with EPS foam (including local bans), but also notes issues and trends within the recycling industry.

**See more stories like this at
NiagaraSierraClub.com**

Let's Get Active!

By Janet Lenicsek

Welcome to 2020! It's a new year and time for thinking about what we Sierrans can do to become more engaged in protecting our natural environment.

One thing that often gets overlooked is the idea of becoming politically active. There are many things that Sierrans can do that will help move public policy and legislation in a pro-environment direction. One of the easiest things to do is to contact elected officials to share your views about current or proposed legislation that could have effects on the environment. You may contact these officials by phone or by writing letters or e-mail messages. It is much easier than most people realize.

First, ask yourself: Is this an urgent issue? If so, then you should call or write a personalized e-mail message rather than a traditional letter. (Due to increased security at the federal level, regular mail can take up to 6 weeks to be received by a senator or other members of US Congress.) Assuming the issue is *not* urgent, you may write or type a traditional letter and mail it using US Postal Service. Below are some tips that will enhance your letters so they have the most impact.

Be sure to address your letter correctly by checking both the address and the proper salutation. You can do this by checking on-line websites such as www.usa.gov/elected-officials or www.ny.gov.

• Write to the legislators for whom you can vote. (Being a constituent provides you with clout.)

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Wind Energy & Public Health

By Bob Ciesielski

A wonderful forum "Wind Energy & Public Health" was held at the University of Buffalo on November 21, 2019, sponsored by the Alliance for Clean Energy New York (ACE NY), the New York League of Conservation Voters, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and New Yorkers for Clean Power. Five speakers included Dr. Jonathan Buonocore of the Harvard School of Public Health,

who addressed the health dangers of small micron-sized particles from fossil fuel combustion, which cause numerous health problems. He also discussed his scientific model showing the benefits of substituting renewable energy sources and removing fossil fuels from the electric grid in different parts of the country. The model demonstrated that the largest health benefits from

the reduction of fossil fuel use would be in the Great Lakes and Northeast regions.

Michael Hankard is a recognized acoustics consultant who has worked on wind turbine placement on over 50 projects in 15 states. He discussed the fact that the New York State requirement for the loudest wind turbine sound is 45 decibels (dBa), which is the same average

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SAVE the DATE!

Learn more about Community Solar opportunities in the Buffalo area.

WHEN: Thursday February 6th, 6:00pm-7:30 pm

WHERE: Crane Library, 633 Elmwood Ave. Buffalo

Learn how you can save money and reduce your carbon footprint with Community Solar. Three experts will participate in a forum to answer our questions and teach us how we can be part of the solution to climate change and save money at the same time. Whether you are a renter, you have too much shade, or don't want to invest in panels, you can still use solar energy for your home by participating in local community solar projects.

Greenwashing Makes More Mess

By Sara Schultz

Recently there have been many articles and reports on what it means to be a “green consumer”.

Green consumerism is trying to fool us into thinking we can buy our way out of our present climate emergency. As well-intentioned as we all are when making our food, clothing and gift choices, we cannot buy our way out!

The corporate world has figured out how to continue duping us into guilt-free spending. With algorithms set up to suggest what purchases we would see and therefore decide we need, we are lured into buying more stuff. Here I was thinking what a great person I am. I just avoided buying clothing made from fossil fuels, or cotton grown without pesticides, or irresponsible toilet paper. Ha! This strategy seems to be working, but if we stop for just a second, we know that making and throwing away stuff is a major cause of climate change.

First, as my mother always said, “only orphans need.” Maybe an exaggeration, but I certainly don’t need a second portable straw or another organic sweatshirt. Second, maybe the extra money spent on first world toilet paper could be spent supporting legislators who will actually put policy in place to protect our resources and us!

Maybe our money could be spent on donating to organizations that are on the frontline everyday fighting for environmental justice, sustainability and conservation. Maybe our money could be spent protecting endangered species or mitigating our carbon footprints with projects through NY Times recommended “gold standard.org”, “green-e.org, or the carbon offset company used by the well-known entrepreneur Mark Cuban, Carbonfund.org Foundation.

Please, don’t stop buying fair trade, organic, local and B Corp. products. These are important choices to push industry toward planet friendly practices. Don’t think our purchases aren’t political because they are and they mean something. Just don’t be fooled, like me, into thinking I can still use my credit card for guilt free and unnecessary stuff. This is the era where we all have to pull back from fast fashion and cheap disposables. Few people really want our used, cheap clothing or poorly made hand me down household items. They will end up on that forever growing pile of waste.

Buy thoughtfully, less and with love for Mother Earth. Gift experiences, edibles, your time or necessities in reusable gift bags. Peace and harmony to all our members for 2020. Let this be the year of planting more native trees and buying less stuff!

“Wind Energy” continued from front page

standard set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Outdoor sounds are automatically reduced by 15 dBA indoors, which brings the loudest sound in a bedroom in the evening to a very quiet 30 dBA. Infrasound, when produced by turbines, is several orders less than can be detected by the human ear.

Dr. Robert McCunney of the Pulmonary Division at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, has conducted clinical studies on illnesses associated with noise. Several large studies of randomly selected people have shown that wind turbines do not create stress, sleep disturbance, or effect blood pressure. Minimal sleep disturbance begins to occur when noise exceeds 46 dBA. Dr. McCunney mentioned population studies as large as 717’000 in Denmark.

A local farmer, Jason Kehl of Strykersville, has had four turbines on his dairy farm for the past ten years. He has kept 150 cows, which have not adversely affected by the turbines. When questioned, Mr. Kehl stated that wildlife including turkeys and deer have actually increased on his farm since the installation of the turbines, and that



Gardening, Native Plants and Insects

By Lynda Schneekloth

The last issue of the Trailblazer introduced the idea that gardening might be a good way to actively address the extinction crisis and help with climate change. The topic in this issue is specifically about insects and ‘native plants’ and why both are so important at this moment.

Insects are probably our least favorite (mosquitos) and most favorite (butterflies) animals. Insects are the most diverse group of organisms and represent 80% of the world’s known species!! Remember, homo sapiens (that’s all of us representing 36% of all mammals), are only one species! Scientists have identified more than 1 million species of insects which means there are at least 4 million species on the earth busy doing things. Indeed, without them we would most likely perish as they provide food for so many other animals such as beloved birds, pollinate our plants, control plant pests, clean up dead matter, and create soil to mention a few.

As all living organisms, insects must have food, shelter and opportunities to reproduce. That’s where gardeners come in as we, along with natural ecological landscapes, are the providers of home and food. Our work begins with what we don’t do – stop using insecticides. We’ve been trained to believe that insects in our gardens are bad and yes, a few of them

are (perhaps 1%), but most are helpful. Rather, we should support insects by providing appropriate food and shelter, which specifically means native plants. Insects and plants evolved together in environments millions of years. Yet in the last 150 years, we’ve spent most of our gardening time and money replacing those plants with exotics (plants from somewhere else) and lawns. As of 2016, a study found 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. Grass is our biggest crop and provides no food or shelters to the insects we need for a healthy ecosystem. <https://www.businessinsider.com/americas-biggest-crop-is-grass-2016-2> And the science of decline is clear: 28% decline in bumble bees in US; 52% decline of butterflies in UK; 33% reduction of abundance of butterflies over 21 years, and on and on. We are finally realizing that we don’t have enough habitat left for most of our species to avoid extinction.

Gardeners, if you want glorious birds and magic butterflies, use natural pest control techniques, and do your part to stop the extinction and climate crises. Plant native plants and stop killing insects!!! (See Douglas W. Tallamy, Bringing Nature Home: How you can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants; Xerces Society (<http://xerces.org>); and the Pollinator Conservation Association in WNY, <http://www.pollinatorconservationassociation.org/>).

Executive Committee Members 2020

Sara Schultz • Robert Ciesielski • Larry Beahan • Roger Cook • Janet Lenichek • John Szalasny • Ellen Banks • Diana Strablow • Charley Bowman • Richard Lippes • Lynda Schneekloth • Rebecca Strong

Please welcome our newest Executive Committee Member, Rebecca Strong.

he has noticed no bird deaths caused by the turbines.

Simon Chapman, of the University of Sydney School of Public Health in Australia, wrote a book “Wind Turbine Syndrome: A Communicated Disease”. Prof. Chapman has toured Europe and presented a map locating the large number of wind turbine farms throughout the continent, with an especially high density in northern Germany and Denmark. People in these areas are not even aware of the term Wind Turbine Syndrome or illnesses attributable to turbines. His book discusses how new technologies often spurs fears of health effects, including the introduction of electricity and telephones. People are susceptible to negative influence by communicated suggestions. In Australia complaints about wind turbines are prevalent where negative publicity has proceeded construction. Professor Chapman describes the alleged disease Wind Turbine Syndrome as an “English speaking phenomenon”, and that critical health cases have not been reported or substantiated in peer-reviewed journals.

“Lets Get Active” continued from front page

- Stick to one issue per letter - you will have greater impact and will get a response letter more quickly.

- Ask the legislator for a specific action, such as cosponsoring a bill or taking a leadership position on a particular issue. Request that the legislator state their position on the issue in their response letter.

- Use your own words and experience to tie the issue to your life or the town, district, county or state that the legislator represents.

- Keep it as concise as possible while getting your points across. (No more than two thirds of a page.)

- Be courteous. When appropriate, express your appreciation for actions taken by the legislator with which you agree.

- Include your return address on your letter, so you can receive a response. (I also include my e-mail address and personal phone number, so if questions arise, legislative staff can contact me relatively quickly.)

If you have never written a legislator regarding an environmental issue, I hope you will challenge yourself and do so in 2020. If you need some help getting started, you can contact me at niagarasierra@gmail.com.

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