



**JAMAICA ENVIRONMENT TRUST**

**REGULATING PLASTIC WASTE IN JAMAICA  
TIME TO ACT**



Jamaica faces a solid waste management crisis, which is evident in towns and cities, rural areas, waterways, on beaches and in the sea. The Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) welcomes the recent focus on this issue, particularly with regard to plastic packaging material (PPM), including Styrofoam. JET notes:

- A statement from Generation 2000 President, Senator Matthew Samuda, indicating his intention to table a Private Members' Motion in Parliament calling for the banning of Styrofoam and plastic bags below a certain size
- A statement from the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) led by Chairman Danville Walker of their support for Senator Samuda's initiative and their intention to begin a dialogue with the importers and producers of PPM
- A petition to ban Styrofoam started by the Montego Bay Marine Park on Earth Day 2016
- Increased attention to this issue on traditional and social media
- The Nuh Dutty Up Jamaica campaign, led by JET, with funding from the Tourism Enhancement Fund
- An increasing number of cleanups by private citizens, groups and companies.
- A new cleanup campaign recently announced by the Minister of Local Government, Hon. Desmond McKenzie.

### **Moving from Concern to Action**

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JET has been working on the challenges presented by single use plastic packaging since the mid-1990s. We recently requested an update on the status of the regulation and management of PPM from the new Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, where the environmental portfolio now resides.

We received a document entitled ***A Short-Term Strategy for the Management of Plastic Packaging Material in Jamaica*** – ***final draft report, dated March 2001***. This study was done by the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited.

#### **Main features of this study were:**

- Funded by the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) and the United Nations Development Programme
- Collaborative effort between the then Ministry of the Environment, the University of the West Indies and “relevant public sector agencies”.
- Executing agency was the Planning Institute of Jamaica, supported by the NRCA.
- Reviewed regional management and regulatory initiatives and laws
- Carried out wide consultation with government agencies, NGOs, industry players and the general public
- Reviewed various policy documents in different stages of development
- Assessed sources and volumes of PPM and general composition of the waste stream in Jamaica
- Evaluated the industry-led recycling programme, Recycle for Life, then in operation
- Described the waste management regulatory and operational framework in Jamaica
- Carried out a social survey to assess the involvement of the general public in litter reduction, recovery, recycling and asked respondents to identify the most effective strategy for recovering one type of PPM, plastic bottles made of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET). (The reason for focusing on PET, as opposed to other types of plastic, was that PET was the volume item in PPM waste, representing over 50% of waste PPM.)
- Assessed potential markets for recycled PPM and described the challenges of accessing those markets, as well as the volatile prices for recycled PET.
- Made recommendations for a short-term strategy to manage PPM, including the relative costs of a range of possible solutions along with the costs of doing nothing.

#### **Of 72 institutions that were surveyed:**

- 79% identified a **Deposit/Refund scheme** as the most effective strategy for recovering PET. Deposit/Refund schemes involve legislation that requires the producers/importers of a particular package to include a deposit in the price of their product. They must then take back the empty container and refund

the deposit to the consumer/retailer. This provides an incentive to bring containers back to collection points, reduces the cost of collection and recycling, and greatly reduces the amount of carelessly discarded waste.

#### **Main recommendations of the study were:**

- A Deposit/Refund scheme for PET, supported by appropriate public education, sensible phasing and targeted legislation.
- An implementation plan was also provided.
- There were no recommendations on Styrofoam or single use plastic bags.

Following further consultation with the private sector producers and importers of PPM, the GOJ elected NOT to follow the recommendations of its consultant and instead implemented an environmental protection levy on packaging in June 2007, with the stated intention that the income from the levy would be used to fund recycling programmes specifically and waste management generally. This had the effect of bringing to a close the private-sector funded recycling programme, Recycle for Life, then in operation. The income from the environmental levy was not used for recycling programmes or waste management until December 2014, when a new public/private agreement initiated Recycling Partners of Jamaica Ltd., the current main plastic recycler now in operation.

Despite the existence of the environmental protection levy and some plastic bottle (PET and HDPE) recycling, the failure to manage PPM in Jamaica is clear.

#### **JET recommends the following priority actions:**

- ✓ Legislation to establish a **Deposit/Refund Scheme** for PET bottles in the first instance. JET agrees with the consultant of the 2001 study that this is the most effective way to ensure that plastic bottles are not discarded in gullies, rivers and on land. Returning plastic bottles for the deposit will also supply small sources of income to collectors. PET bottles are the volume items of PPM, so this is why only PET will be targeted in the first instance.
- ✓ **Ban the importation of Styrofoam.** We understand that 70% of the Styrofoam consumed in Jamaica is made locally. Set a time frame, in consultation with Styrofoam producers, within which they will transition to manufacture or import biodegradable food containers as an alternative to Styrofoam. Move to an outright ban of the use of Styrofoam in Jamaica within three years.
- ✓ **Legislation to require a charge for single use plastic bags.** This has been shown in other countries to reduce consumption of these bags by significant percentages. Move to an outright ban within five years.
- ✓ **Scale up of existing recycling operations** for PET and HDPE PPM. Many more collection depots are needed. Given the low price of recycled plastic on world markets (due to low oil prices), this should be funded by income from the environmental protection levy, as was the intention.
- ✓ **Public education** to reduce consumer demand for and use of PPM.