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## **SPOTLIGHT: Molded Fiber**



# City of San Diego Prefers Recyclable Plastic [\(click here for the ordinance\)](#)

Population: 1.5 million

**PREFERRED:** RECYCLABLE plastic

**NOT PREFERRED:** molded fiber, bagasse, bamboo, sugarcane, compostable/biodegradable plastic

Preferred			NOT Preferred		
Material	Product	Comments	Material	Product	Comments
Reusable service ware	Reusable plates, bowls and cups	Wash and reuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper (coated with materials other than clay, for example, poly, PLA, or other materials)</li> <li>"Compostable" and "biodegradable" plastic, sugarcane, bagasse, bamboo, <u>molded fiber</u> and other similar items</li> </ul>	Bowls, plates, trays, cups, hinged containers, boxes, lids, wrap	Not Recyclable, must be placed in trash. Not accepted in local recycling or composting programs. Does not help San Diego reach its zero waste goals.
Paper (uncoated or clay coated)	Bowls, plates, trays, cups, hinged containers, boxes	Recyclable if free of food			
Aluminum	Trays, lidded containers, wrap	Recyclable if free of food			
Plastic (rigid, non-foam)	Bowls, plates, trays, cups, lids, hinged containers	Recyclable if free of food			

# Why Not Molded Fiber?

## Coating, Liner, or Binding Agents

To maintain structural integrity due to the moist nature of meat...

- Molded fiber often requires a coating, liner, or binding agent.
- The result: By and large, you now have a package that cannot be easily composted, biodegraded, or recycled.
- There are only [134](#) commercial composting facilities across the country that will accept fiber compostable products, which is required for the packaging to degrade properly.
- PFAS or PLA are often used.

## PFAS

Many\* molded fiber packaging products are coated with PFAS.

- Does not degrade naturally
- Banned in many areas
- Can be [harmful](#) to humans
- Requires an industrial composting facility, but [new standards](#) prohibit them from being accepted.

\*If the trays don't contain PFAS, then they may be lined with PLA, which poses many other issues...

## PLA

- Will contaminate the recycling stream if included with regular plastics.
- High-heat environments may cause it to be compromised.
- Must be heated to 140 degrees Fahrenheit and exposed to special digestive microbes so that they can biodegrade.
- Many big cities do not even have the correct industrial facilities for this process, let alone the sorting infrastructure.
- Depletes the nutrients on farmland, and food costs go up.

## Not Practical

Molded fiber trays require a high-heat facility to degrade properly. And there are approximately ONLY [134 facilities](#) nationally that accept molded fiber! So, unless you feel like driving – and driving far – chances are it will end up in a landfill.

Molded fiber packaging is TRULY single-use. You cannot use it again, unlike recyclable plastic.

Even if the product claims to be recyclable, compostable, and biodegradable and can hold moist products, real-world testing has shown:

- It tends to bend and lose its shape
  - Loses shelf appeal
  - Impacts protection capabilities

# Why Not Molded Fiber?

## Paper-based

Should be every environmentalist's nightmare:

- [Pulp/paper is the third largest industrial polluter to air, water, and land in the United States.](#)
- [This type of packaging significantly contributes to deforestation](#), which is one of the [top environmental problems](#) today. [More than two billion trees are now logged every year for packaging alone.](#) Now, imagine the resources and time required to grow just one tree! And there is a [shortage on lumber](#) to boot.
- It takes [approximately three gallons of water to make one sheet of paper.](#) Water then becomes tainted by various chemicals, polluting the water system and environment as a whole.
- If you freeze a product in a molded fiber tray, the packaging tends to stick to the product.
- View more stats and facts about paper being eco-UNfriendly [here](#).

## Bagasse-based

[Bagasse](#) (sugarcane) must be imported from tropical areas:

- Increases costs
- Increases carbon footprint

Requires commercial composting facilities, which are few and far between.

Many composting facilities will not accept bagasse packaging:

- Sent to the landfill where it negatively impacts global warming by releasing methane gas.

## Bamboo-based

Bamboo is imported, which increases its carbon footprint and raises prices (sometimes making the packaging cost prohibitive).

Requires commercial composting facilities, which are few and far between.

Recent push to grow bamboo in the States:

- Would take food-producing land now utilized as farmland or orchards and convert it to non-edible products
- Depletes the nutrients on farmland
- Impacts the world's poor (less food, price of food goes up)

# Summary

Research and make your decisions accordingly.

- Not all plastics are equal.
- Molded fiber may sound more eco-friendly, but it generally isn't when you examine the whole process. It's TRULY single-use, whereas recyclable plastic can be used again and again. It also requires a high-heat facility to degrade properly, and there are only a few industrial composting facilities nationally that even accept molded fiber.
- Molded fiber packaging tends to lose its form when showcasing moist products, impacting product protection and shelf appeal – two of the primary purposes of packaging.

In short, no option is perfect.

Many molded fiber marketing claims just don't hold water – and that's partially because molded fiber itself doesn't hold water.

PET plastic is easily recycled, preserves land for food crops, doesn't kill trees or waste water, won't get deformed, protects the product, and is visually appealing. It's number 1 for a reason.





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