

FROM: Working Group #2, ATHGO Los Angeles: Global Warming: Change your Attitude, Not the Weather

SUBJECT: Elimination of Non-Biodegradable Plastic Packaging in the Food Industry

**I. Action Forcing Event:** Working Group #2, concerned by the environmental impact of non-biodegradable plastics, has chosen to attack the unnecessary use of plastic packaging, specifically in the food industry. Landfills around the world are reaching capacity and land costs may prove to be prohibitive to the continued development of new sites. The life span of plastic products in our current waste system has been estimated to exceed one thousand years, and any degradation that does occur releases organic chlorides, methane, and nitrous oxides into the atmosphere. Plastic waste also proves a threat to our ecosystems, killing one hundred thousand animals per year in the United States alone. Additionally, the majority of plastic products today are petroleum based, contributing to our continued dependence on oil. *Environmental Protection Agency.*

**II. Background/Analysis:** Plastics offer a cheap and convenient method for transporting food from the farm, to the store, and finally to the consumer. Currently, five hundred billion plastic bags are distributed throughout the United States per year, an amount equivalent to sixty million barrels of oil. Countries around the world have already begun to attack plastic dependence. China recently banned all plastic bags, Ireland implemented a sizeable tax on bags (usually provided at no cost by stores), and Germany has succeeded in reducing plastic packaging at its source. However, the United States, a nation known for its world leading potential is largely lacking in this arena. Due to the current infrastructure of our urban communities, the high pace of our daily lives, and the convenience offered by plastic products, Working Group #2 feels the implementation of a plastic source reduction policy worldwide will be challenging, yet feasible. *Environmental Protection Agency.*

**III. Recommendations:** The ideal goal of our policy is to shift the current system to one in which only biodegradable reusable materials are used within the food industry. By putting immediate pressure on the United States to take the forefront of the issue, it will help create an impetus for international change. Through a standard of "Best Available Technology" (BAT), an incremental decrease in the amount of plastic packaging will push the marketplace to completely eliminate current plastics by 2013. During the first phase of our policy implementation, we will transfer existing government subsidies for the petroleum industry to further research and development in plastic alternatives and better recycling techniques. During the second phase, producers and suppliers within the food industry will begin to make the shift by incorporating newly developed technologies while encouraging consumers to accept these changes by levying a tax on products that continue to use traditional plastic materials. This tax will be similar to the California Redemption Value (CRV), in that, all remaining plastics must be recyclable and will be returnable for a refund of the tax. By phase three, the food industry will have eliminated as much of the traditional plastic products as possible based on BAT. In addition, the consumers have had an opportunity to adjust to a new marketplace and new shopping habits.

**IV. Group's Role:** Members of Working Group #2 can begin to push for the elimination of plastic packaging within the food industry by speaking to their local food markets and expressing their concerns about the impacts of plastic in face of our current climate situation. In addition, members can begin to make the shift to reusable, biodegradable products in their own life, and educate their peers and community members of the benefits of following their examples.