Protecting Our Waters from Plastic Pollution:
Boat Shrink-Wrapping

HF3320 (Kraft)

Plastic is finding its way into more and more aspects of our lives, even storing boats! Plastic creates serious toxic impacts across its entire lifecycle, with low-income communities and communities of color most impacted. Communities are impacted by air and water pollution stemming from plastic production and use. We are all exposed to the chemicals contained in everyday plastics, from the food we eat that is wrapped in plastic to the vinyl flooring in our homes. Over half of all plastics ever made were produced in the last 15 years and only 5-6% of all plastics are recycled. The rest are landfilled or incinerated.

And the problem is only getting worse. As the energy infrastructure transitions toward more renewable sources, industry is shifting toward more plastic production.[3] If left unchecked, plastic production is set to triple by 2060.[4] If plastic production continues at its current pace, the emissions from this production could reach 1.34 gigatons per year — equivalent to the emissions released by more than 295 new 500-megawatt coal-fired power plants.[5]

Since fossil fuel based plastics are the primary use of toxic chemical additives, the increase of plastics production means increased production and exposure to toxic chemicals. In addition, there are over 10,000 chemicals used in plastics production, many with no information on their hazards.

Now, about those boats. Did you know that many are shrink-wrapped in plastic to protect them when they're out of the water over the winter?

In Minnesota…

- We lead the nation in boats per capita with roughly 14,500 vessels per 100,000 population.[1]

- In 2022, boat registrations in the state totaled 822,450, second only to Florida.[1] Of these, about 90% are large enough to be shrink wrapped.[6]

- Based on data from other states, it's likely that 180,000 — 300,000 MN boats are shrink-wrapped every year.[7] A 30-foot boat takes 30 pounds of plastic to wrap.[2]

- If 250,000 boats received an average of 25 pounds of wrap each — a moderate estimate — the waste would total 6.25 million pounds of plastic every year, with the vast majority of that entering our landfills.[1]

- Currently only a miniscule amount of this plastic is recycled and kept out of the waste stream.

What does this legislation do?

- Creates a product stewardship program to responsibly recycle and reuse boat shrink-wrap.

- Requires producers, through membership in a stewardship organization, to implement and finance a statewide product stewardship program to reduce the volume of boat wrap disposed of in landfills by promoting and providing for the collection and recycling of boat wrap.

- Sets goals and a mechanism for tracking progress towards recycling the majority of boat shrink-wrap plastic used in Minnesota.

Why will this work?

- A mechanical technology exists that uses chemical free, toxic free methods to turn used boat plastic into resin. This resin is then turned back into boat plastic. There is even a company in Minnesota that can do this today.

1   https://www.startribune.com/boat-shrink-wrap-winter-minnesota-legislature/600311603/
2   https://themainemonitor.org/shrink-wrap-coming-off-maine-boats-and-then-what
3   https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/29/how-the-fossil-fuel-industry-is-pushing-plastics-on-the-world-.html
4   https://oecd.org/environment/global-plastic-waste-set-to-almost-triple-by-2060.htm
5   https://www.ciel.org/project-update/plastic-climate-the-hidden-costs-of-a-plastic-planet/
6   https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/good-question-minnesota-boat-ownership/
7   https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/afd2a2070d914b9ca87e98b95a855cce