

Committee: Environment and Transportation

Testimony on: HB 92, Environment – Beverage Containers Connected with Plastic

Rings - Prohibition on Sale

Position: Support with amendment

Hearing Date: February 4, 2026

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Clubs supports HB 92, which would prohibit the sale of beverage containers connected with plastic rings, with an amendment that would remove the exemption for bio-degradable plastic rings.

Since their introduction sixty years ago, plastic six-pack rings have been harmful to our environment. They are frequently littered,¹ entrap wildlife, and ultimately break into micro- and nano-plastics, which endanger public health.²

The ring shape of the product poses a singular threat to wildlife. A 2018 article in *National Geographic* reported that up to one million birds and more than 100,000 mammals had been entrapped and killed annually by six-pack rings.³ The rings continue to be a threat in Maryland. Over the past six months alone, volunteers have collected and photographed over 100 littered plastic rings on stretches of the Potomac River and Piscataway Creek shorelines, the Patuxent watershed, and other natural places (Exhibit 1). Flexible littered plastic rings, as well as rigid plastic beverage container connectors with rings, holes, or gaps, pose similar threats to wildlife (Exhibit 2).

Bio-degradable⁴ and photo-degradable⁵ plastic rings are not a solution. Biodegradable rings require the high temperatures of an industrial composting facility in order to degrade. Both remain a threat to wildlife since the rings stay intact for months - or even years - in a natural environment. They eventually fragment into microplastics that are ingested by birds and fish, and pose a significant threat to human health.⁶

There are many safer alternatives that do not threaten wildlife or contribute plastic pollution in the environment, such as cardboard wraps and carriers for beverages (Exhibit 3).⁷ These paper-

¹Surfrider Foundation website (<https://cleanups.surfrider.org/results/>).

²They are also not recyclable because of their shape.

³Gibbens, Sarah. 2018. "Saving the Ocean from Plastic Six-Pack Rings". *National Geographic*. September 19 (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/news-plastic-six-pack-rings-alternatives-history/>).

⁴Kumari, Anita. 2025. "Fastest Biodegradable Material that Can Be a Game Changer for Reducing Plastic Waste," *Made with Regen website* (<https://made-with-regen.ca/blog/fastest-biodegradable-material/>).

⁵EPA Fact Sheet. 1994. "EPA Sets Degradability Standards for Plastic Ring Carriers." February (www.nepsis.epa.gov).

⁶Agrawal, Nina. 2025. "What Experts Want You to Know about Microplastics." *The New York Times*. May 20 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/20/well/microplastics-health-risks.html>).

⁷WestRock. "8 alternatives to plastic packaging for brands that want to be more sustainable" (<https://www.westrock.com/blog/8-alternatives-to-plastic-packaging>); Smurfit Westrock. "Multipack Packaging & Six-Pack Rings" (<https://www.smurfitwestrock.com/products/packaging/paperboard/multipack-packaging-and-six-pack-rings>); Fast Company. 2019. "These new Coke and Bud packages ditch plastic six-pack rings for cardboard

based products are currently available, and have been adopted elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad. A major Coca-Cola distributor in the Northeast recently dropped the use of plastic rings in favor of cardboard.⁸ In Canada, which banned flexible six-pack rings as of June 2024, similar cardboard products are in use.⁹ Beverage manufacturers in the E.U. are also phasing out plastic rings.¹⁰

For over 60 years, plastic rings that connect beverage containers have posed a threat to wildlife and contributed to plastic pollution. There are safer alternatives that avoid both of these environmental impacts. HB 92, if amended to remove the exemption for degradable plastic rings, would eliminate the sale of these harmful plastic rings and encourage the transition to environmentally friendly alternatives. The Sierra Club respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 92, amended to remove the exemption for biodegradable plastic rings.

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Attachments

Exhibit 1. Littered Plastic Six-Pack Rings on the Shoreline, Fort Washington Park

Exhibit 2. Other Types of Plastic Beverage Rings with Similar Environmental Impacts

Exhibit 3. Cardboard Alternatives to Plastic Rings

carriers” (<https://www.fastcompany.com/90439524/these-new-coke-and-bud-packages-ditch-plastic-six-pack-rings-for-cardboard-carriers>)

⁸ McGraw Hill. 2022. “Coca-Cola Bottler Replaces Plastic Six-Pack Rings,” September 22 (<https://www.mheducation.com/highered/blog/2022/09/coca-cola-bottler-replaces-plastic-six-pack-rings.html>).

⁹ Environment and Climate Change Canada. 2023. *Guidance for Selecting Alternatives to Single-Use Plastics as Defined in the Single-Use Plastics Prohibited Regulations* (https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2023/eccc/En14-494-2-2023-eng.pdf).

¹⁰ BBC. 2019. “Guinness maker Diageo removes plastic from multipacks.” April 19 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-47926399>); Smithers, Rebecca. 2019. “Budweiser to stop using plastic for all its UK beer four-packs before 2021,” *The Guardian*. September 23 (<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/sep/23/budweiser-to-stop-using-plastic-for-all-its-uk-beer-four-packs-before-2021>).

Exhibit 1: Plastic Six-Pack Rings on the Shoreline, Fort Washington Park



Piscataway Creek shoreline, 11/9/2025



Flat clip on Piscataway Creek shoreline, 11/11/2025



Potomac shoreline, 11/7/2025



Potomac shoreline, 10/31/2025



Weathered ring breaking into plastic fragments, 10/23/2025



Weathered plastic ring, loop still intact, 10/24/2025

Exhibit 2: Other Plastic Beverage Ring Carriers with Similar Environmental Impacts



Exhibit 3: Cardboard Alternatives to Plastic Rings

