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Plastic Free Padre Pilot Program Will Help Reduce Aquatic Litter from Single-Use Plastic and Polystyrene

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, TEXAS - Gulf Guardians, in partnership with Keep Texas Beautiful, is seeking local restaurants to join Plastic Free Padre, a pilot program helping to reduce single-use plastics and polystyrene use on South Padre Island. The program will kick off in the first half of 2022 and participating restaurants will shift to alternative materials for items like cutlery packets and takeout containers without raising prices for customers.

The pilot program is led by Gulf Guardians, a local nonprofit dedicated to education and community outreach opportunities, and the initiative is funded by Keep Texas Beautiful through an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Trash Free Waters Grant. Participating restaurants will receive technical assistance and microgrants to help offset the initial costs of transitioning away from single-use plastic items.

“We are excited to launch this program on SPI. We hope our work and the participation of our coastal community will inspire other cities on the Gulf Coast and beyond to do the same,” said Aarin Hartwell, Founder and Director of Gulf Guardians. “The pilot program is a first step to raising awareness about single-use plastics and polystyrene at our local restaurants. We’re hoping the program helps to develop a larger market for alternative products in the South Padre Island area.”

The shift to alternative materials will help create sustainable, long-term plastic-free businesses without raising the cost of doing business. Reducing single-use plastic waste can help businesses save money by reducing the amount of single-use items they are providing customers; for example, plastic cutlery packages cost upwards of \$.05 each. Businesses can also save money by switching to reusable items and reducing the amount they send to the landfill, leading to lower trash-hauling fees. Restaurants that have participated in similar programs across the country have saved as much as \$3,700 annually through product minimization and waste hauling.

Beyond the business case, reducing waste is a critical step to protecting our waterways. It is estimated that approximately 80% of aquatic litter is generated on land before finding its way to the ocean.

“Reducing single use plastic items is paramount to reducing the amount of litter making its way to Texas beaches and eventually to the ocean,” said Sara Nichols, KTB Program Director. “This litter costs cities





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and taxpayers money to clean up, and once it makes it to the ocean, poses a huge threat to wildlife and aquatic ecosystems, which so many coastal communities rely on for food and tourism.”

South Padre Island-area restaurants are invited to join the Plastic Free Padre pilot program. To participate or to learn more, please contact Aarin Hartwell, Gulf Guardians, at txgulfguardians@gmail.com or 956-455-5238.

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Media contacts

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About Keep Texas Beautiful

Keep Texas Beautiful (KTB) is a non-profit organization dedicated to making Texas the best place to live, work, and play by deploying resources for community improvement projects, clean-ups, and youth engagement efforts across the state. Through our Keep Texas Recycling program, we provide assistance and education to support recycling in rural and underserved communities.

Everything we do is focused on mobilizing volunteers to take action by providing them with tools, resources, and training. Our fieldwork includes research on best practices for litter reduction along with the development of community programs to prevent the flow of litter to the Gulf.

Founded in 1967, Keep Texas Beautiful’s work is driven by its network of nearly 300 affiliate member communities, volunteers, and supporters that reach 17 million Texans annually. For more information and to find your closest affiliate, visit www.ktb.org. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About Gulf Guardians

The Gulf Guardians is an environmental education 501c3, nonprofit organization with a mission to further environmental stewardship on South Padre Island and the Gulf Coast communities. At the core, our mission is creating long-term sustainable change for our most vulnerable community members. The Gulf Guardians provide professional development opportunities, facilitate community engagement workshops, lead citizen science projects, and increase community resilience through active opportunities for the South Padre Island community.