

THE PROBLEM

Single-use expanded polystyrene containers fill up our landfills, endanger our wildlife, and are easily replaced by biodegradable alternatives. Once thrown away, these containers sit in landfills for lifetimes.

Polystyrene is also a common source of litter in our waterways, urban areas, and parks. There are currently no municipalities in Connecticut with expanded polystyrene recycling programs in place. New polystyrene must, therefore, be continuously manufactured. Because polystyrene is made from petroleum, a dirty fossil fuel, its production generates significant greenhouse gases, thus worsening the climate crisis.

As polystyrene degrades, it often breaks into small pieces, posing a hazard to wildlife. Additionally, the chemicals found in these containers can leach into the food or drink they contain, posing a significant health risk to children.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

The solution to our polystyrene problem must be focused on waste reduction and reusable packaging. One major health concern in regard to food packaging and food service ware is the ubiquitous presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in all of these products.

There are many compostable or biodegradable alternatives to expanded polystyrene, but these alternatives often also contain chemicals like plasticizers, hardeners, and PFAS. While they may be based upon naturally occurring materials, like corn, soy, sugar, or bamboo, the so-called compostable alternatives cannot be composted in backyards or farm compost piles. They require anaerobic digestion equipment (industrial composting), where they are liquified into a slurry and sometimes mixed with animal waste to create biofuels.

In recent years, large companies like IKEA and Dell have transitioned from polystyrene packaging to more sustainable options. In addition, dozens of cities across the country have successfully adopted bans. Cities that have implemented polystyrene container bans have not suffered negative economic impacts.

Connecticut lawmakers need to acknowledge the threat polystyrene exposes to public and environmental



health. The time is now for Connecticut to say no to polystyrene containers.

INEQUITY IN POLYSTYRENE

Polystyrene that ends up in landfills is usually burned at incineration or trash-to-energy facilities. Ozone pollution is a byproduct of that energy production. Connecticut is ranked 10th in the nation for the worst ozone pollution, and the burning of waste in the City of Hartford is an overwhelming contributor to this pollution crisis. Approximately 70 municipalities send their waste to be burned in our capital city.

Trash-to-energy facilities like the one in Hartford are disproportionately cited in low-income and minority communities. These populations are forced to breathe in higher rates of polluted air, which contributes to greater rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

FAST FACTS

- ◆ Polystyrene waste accounts for approximately **30% of landfill space** in the U.S.
- ◆ Styrene and benzene, chemicals found in polystyrene, have been identified as possible **carcinogens** by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- ◆ Recently, Connecticut municipalities - Westport, Norwalk, Stamford, and the Town of Groton - enacted ordinances to ban EPS foam products.

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