

THE PROBLEM

Polystyrene is a synthetic polymer most known for its use in Expanded Polystyrene Foam (EPS) - sometimes incorrectly referred to as Styrofoam. Single-use expanded polystyrene (EPS) 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 a significant amount of greenhouse gas, thus worsening the climate crisis.

As polystyrene degrades, it often breaks down into micro plastics, posing a hazard to wildlife. Additionally, the chemicals found in these containers can leach into the food or drink they contain if they are exposed to heat, posing a significant health risk, especially to children.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

Connecticut lawmakers need to acknowledge the threat polystyrene exposes to public and environmental health. Legislation was proposed in the 2022 session to ban certain uses of expanded polystyrene, and this will be a priority issue in 2023. 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 so-called compostable or biodegradable plastic alternatives to expanded polystyrene, but these often contain chemicals, including plasticizers and 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.



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 has been an overwhelming contributor to this pollution crisis.

Trash-to-energy facilities are disproportionately sited 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. With the closing of the Hartford trash-to-energy plant in 2022, exporting trash to other states only exacerbates the problem and outsources these same issues to other

FAST FACTS

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

MORE INFORMATION

Jeanine Behr Getz
(917)-297-4537
www.byoct.org