



Polystyrene Food Container Issues


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September 28, 2011




Overview




- Several dozen cities and counties have banned polystyrene one-time-use food service ware
- Concern over human health, litter, and marine life impact

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Types



- Foam
 - Styrofoam
 - Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)
 - Extruded Polystyrene (XPS)
- Non-Foam
 - A hard-surfaced version of the plastic
- Made from fossil fuel and styrene (vinyl benzene)

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Polystyrene Foam




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Polystyrene Non-Foam





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Concerns




- 20 years ago, CFC ozone impact
- Now
 - Human health impact
 - Litter impact on the environment
 - Impact on marine animals in particular


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Human Health


- U.S. Dept. HHS June 2011 classification of styrene as substance “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen.”
- World Health Organization statement, 2000
- Plastics industry disputes claims that polystyrene food service ware poses any risks to humans

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Litter Impacts

- PS does not degrade in the environment
- Foam has a tendency to breakdown into smaller pieces and be mistaken for food in marine environments
- Foam is easily blown even when disposed properly
- Floats easily

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Foam Pictures



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Laws


- Most bans in coastal areas of CA, WA, OR
- CA considering state ban on foam
- Some legislation singles out polystyrene foam, while other laws apply to all polystyrene food service items

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Types of Laws


1. Prohibit government spending on PS food service ware
2. Prohibit private businesses from using PS food service ware
3. Require private food service businesses to use reusable, biodegradable, compostable, or recyclable food service ware

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Seattle Law

- Staged to first ban foam PS service ware in 2009
- 2nd stage required use of compostable or recyclable service ware by July 2010
- Exemption until July 2011 on utensils, straws, small cups, and foil-faced wrap.

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Composting Requirement

- Requiring recycling of one-time-use service ware may not be effective due to food contamination
- City must have established food composting infrastructure before requiring compostable items.

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