

## STYROFOAM REPORT

---

Definition of Styrofoam

Dangers to humans

Dangers to environment

Recycling of Styrofoam

US Communities that have banned or limited Styrofoam

Sources: Environmental Research Foundation, Clean Water Action  
(California)

### **What is Styrofoam?**

According to the Clean Water Action of California, Styrofoam, or, more officially, Polystyrene, is a combination of Styrene and Benzene. Styrene is a lab animal carcinogen. When polystyrene is heated or in contact with hot, fatty or acidic foods it can break down—especially under the microwave! The styrene then can migrate into food and beverages. It is not excreted from humans as waste but accumulates in fat tissue. Styrene residues are found in 100% of all samples of human fat tissue. Although some styrene leaches into fatty or acidic foods, the Styrofoam remains intact, making it a pervasive form of litter that ultimately ends up on our beaches (because it floats) and in the sea. Ultimately in small pieces, it is eaten by fish and gets into the food chain.

Styrofoam previously used for food is not recyclable. Other forms are only recyclable by a few companies in the nation. All these companies can do, however, is to break up the Styrofoam into smaller pieces and sell it for reuse for such things as packaging peanuts. The EPA reports polystyrene manufacturing the 5<sup>th</sup> largest creator of hazardous waste. Because Styrofoam is made with hydrochlorofluorocarbons, its effect on global warming is 100 times greater than that of carbon dioxide emissions. Another concern for humans is that styrene exposure appears to have a high correlation with leukemia and lymphoma. Styrene has also reported to be associated with hearing loss, balance, concentration problems, lung tumors, pancreatic, colorectal, and bladder cancer.

Over 100 cities in North America have banned the use of Styrofoam including Brookline, and Somerville MA. Northampton is also considering a ban. Other cities are Freeport and Portland ME, Minneapolis MN, Raway NJ, Glen Cove, New York NY, and Suffolk County NY, Portland OR, Issaquah, San Juan County and Seattle, WA, Washington, DC and finally, at least 75 cities in CA.

**Substitutions** for Styrofoam include recycled paper, molded paper pulp packaging, bamboo, corn plastics, and aluminum.

Some costs of comparative substitutions are attached.

### **What We Can Do**

1. Do not use Styrofoam for foods—especially for hot beverages, oily foods, fruit juices or wine. Use reusable or recyclable plates or cups.

2. If packages come packed in Styrofoam, recycle.

3. If your community does not provide recycling for Styrofoam, publish who will recycle it. And/or also encourage your community to provide a Styrofoam recycling day.

4. Select items for sale that is not wrapped in Styrofoam—especially grocery items.

5. Tell others of the harmful effects of Styrofoam to your health and the environment.

6. Work to ban Styrofoam in your community.