

Support SB 568 [Senator Lowenthal]

Ban on Polystyrene Foam Takeout Food Packaging



The Problem: Expanded polystyrene foam (EPS), often referred to as Styrofoam[®] is pervasive in the environment, is extremely damaging throughout its lifecycle, and is rarely recycled. Non-foam polystyrene (PS) is also used for take-out food and is harmful in the marine environment and harmful to public health.

Workers in polystyrene products manufacturing are exposed to many harmful chemicals, including Styrene, Toluene, Xylene, Acetone, Methyl Chloride, and Methyl Ketone. Occupational exposure to Styrene increases risk of lymphoma, leukemia, lung tumors, pancreatic cancer, urinary bladder cancer, prostate cancer, and colorectal cancer. High rates of neurotoxicological effects have been reported in workers.

Public health is impacted by the use of all polystyrene food containers. Styrene migrates from polystyrene containers into food and beverages when heated, or in contact with fatty or acidic foods. Styrene residues are found in 100% of all samples of human fat tissue- every American is exposed, primarily through food and packaging. Styrene is a carcinogen in lab animal testing, a potential human carcinogen, and a neurotoxin.

The environment is inundated with polystyrene. Approximately 15% of street litter and litter in storm drains in many urban municipalities is polystyrene. Plastics comprise 90 percent of floating marine debris. A study of beach debris at 43 sites along the Orange County coast found EPS was the second most abundant form of beach debris. Because it is lightweight and floats, EPS is easily swept from streets and through storm drains out to the ocean. In the environment, the containers break down into small pieces that are easily mistaken for food by marine wildlife.

Recycling is not the answer. Polystyrene containers are rarely recycled because it's not cost effective and food contaminated containers can't be recycled, unless they are washed, thereby adding additional cost and water and energy to a very cheap disposable material. Dart Container is establishing some recycling of foam food containers, but it is expensive and the quantity recycled is too small to measure. Recycling is not a solution to the foam litter problem, since people who litter do not recycle, and foam food containers can still escape from open dumps and dumpsters to the environment.

Local jurisdictions spend millions cleaning litter. Caltrans spends approximately \$60 million a year to remove litter and debris from roadsides and highways, The County of Los Angeles (L.A.) spends \$18 million annually on litter cleanup and education. Since 2001, Southern California cities have spent in excess of \$1.7 billion cleaning trash out of storm drain systems leading to the L.A. River and Ballona Creek in order to comply with stormwater regulations.

The Solution: SB 568 will eliminate a pernicious source of plastic pollution. *48 California jurisdictions have already taken action!* <http://www.cleanwateraction.org/ca>