

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.

Polystyrene has proven to be a headache for recycling centers as it is often contaminated with food waste and cannot easily be reused or recycled. There is not a single recycling center in Connecticut that accepts polystyrene waste. New polystyrene must, therefore, be continuously manufactured. Because polystyrene is made from petroleum, a dirty fossil fuel, its production generates significant greenhouse gases.

As polystyrene degrades, it often breaks into small pieces, posing a hazard to wildlife. Additionally, the chemicals found in these containers can leak when exposed to heat, posing a significant risk to children.

A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION

There are numerous biodegradable alternatives to polystyrene. Outside of reusable containers and reduced consumption, a litany of environmentally-friendly options exist, such as starch, bamboo, and other biodegradable materials.

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 on polystyrene.

It is important to note that cities that have implemented polystyrene container bans have not suffered negative economic impacts. A study of Seattle's ban found that no store or vendor went out of business due to the ban.

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.

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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.

Polystyrene that does not make it to a landfill often ends up as litter, particularly in urban communities where it contributes to blight.

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.
- In San Francisco, independent studies observed a 41% decrease in polystyrene in the first three years of a polystyrene ban.