



Recycle your Styrofoam™

by EcoSangha

Protecting the environment, the health and welfare of all living beings and our futures sounds like an extraordinary task. But with one simple act, you can help to move towards these goals.

Recycle your Styrofoam! We are fortunate to have a recycling facility close by - you no longer have to wonder what to do with this potentially toxic material. We must all make responsible choices to consider our purchases and be mindful of our actions. Try not to buy anything packaged in Styrofoam but if unavoidable, please do your best to recycle.

EcoSangha will continue to offer the service of handling your styrofoam recycling if you have amounts too small to warrant a trip. However, if you have a fairly large amount, it is difficult for our volunteers to handle and we encourage you to make the short drive to the recycling facility located just off of Highway 880 in Milpitas (details and directions below). EcoSangha does not profit from this service but provides it for the convenience of the Sangha and to prevent Styrofoam from getting into the landfills. *Please read on for more information and details on how to recycle Styrofoam.*

Styrofoam is a brand of expanded polystyrene (EPS), also known as polystyrene foam, invented by the Dow Chemical Company in 1941. Polystyrene is a synthetic petroleum-based plastic that's often used to make products like food/product packaging and lab equipment. It takes 500+ years for polystyrene to break down and disintegrate (depending on the amount of UV light exposure and the surrounding natural environment). This means that virtually every piece of plastic that was ever produced still exists today in some shape or form.

To give you an idea of the amount of expanded polystyrene (EPS) produced and ultimately turned to waste:

- The United States produces about **3 million tons of EPS** every year releasing approximately 21 million tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere contributing to global warming.
- EPS is one of the most abundant forms of **global pollution**.
- The world uses 500 billion plastic (EPS and polyethylene) cups every year; **Americans alone throw away an estimated 25 billion foam cups every year.**

Styrofoam (EPS) poses many human health risks, endangers ocean life and wildlife, pollutes our environment and contributes to global warming. EPS is not biodegradable - it breaks into tiny toxic particles and stays in our environment for hundreds of years. Fish, other sea animals, some birds (studies have been primarily focused on seabirds) and other wildlife mistake Styrofoam bits as food. Damage to their digestive tracts, blockage and toxins lead to their death. Whether in our landfills, oceans, waterways or soil, EPS is threatening our wildlife and entering into our food chains and bodies.

The manufacturing of polystyrene requires the use of hydrocarbons such as styrene and benzene. These hydrocarbons are released into the air and react with nitrogen oxides to produce ground-level ozone, a hazardous air pollutant. Ground-level ozone can impair lung function and lead to respiratory illness.

Benzene and styrene (styrene is produced from ethylene and benzene) are also both known carcinogens and pose many other health risks. Benzene exposure is linked to numerous symptoms (some life-threatening), decreased red blood cell levels and an increased risk of leukemia. Studies have also shown that benzene and styrene can harm the central nervous system and may affect reproductive organs. Ethylene likewise increases the risk of lymphoid cancers and breast cancer in women. Remember: never microwave food or drinks in a Styrofoam container.

Plastics, including EPS, degrade but do not biodegrade (breakdown through natural decomposition). And they are not only found in single-use cups/bags and product packaging; face washes, children's toys, nylon ropes and even your regular load of laundry can release millions of tiny plastic microfibers into our waters. And these plastic 'pieces' become increasingly toxic by absorbing other contaminants from municipal and agricultural runoff. So much is at risk if we continue to ignore the danger of plastics.

Polystyrene is recyclable although currently very limited and in many instances, not recyclable. It can only be recycled back into itself or a very similar material. And, due to the fact there are very few recycling facilities and it is not an accepted recyclable in most areas, most styrofoam ends up in landfills. Consequently, **styrofoam** and similar products use 30% of landfill space in the United States.

There are growing uses for repurposed polystyrene - plastic furniture, building and bridge construction, and roads that are vulnerable to freezing and thawing conditions (aids in flexibility). And note, you can take your unwanted foam packing peanuts to any UPS Store - most will accept these.

While California should consider a ban on Styrofoam (EPS) as Colorado, Maine, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Washington, D.C. have done, it is important to be responsible about what we buy/use and how to handle any Styrofoam (EPS) waste in our households.

Encouraging news! Many California counties and cities have individually implemented bans on expanded polystyrene (EPS). Here is a list for your reference:

<https://www.cawrecycles.org/polystyrene-local-ordinances>

PLEASE RECYCLE YOUR STYROFOAM! Again, we are fortunate to have a recycling facility in our area. We encourage everyone to act responsibly and, if possible, take your unneeded Styrofoam (EPS) directly to:

Newby Island Resource Recovery Park
(sign reads Republic Services Newby Island Recyclery)
1601 Dixon Landing Rd, Milpitas, CA 95035
408-262-1401
Monday - Saturday
8:00am - 4:00pm

- Make sure your foam has the PS 6 (Polystyrene) symbol
Note: you may not see the mark all on styrofoam (EPS) pieces but use your best judgment on whether or not to include in your recycling.
- White styrofoam (EPS) only.
- Please place foam in clear, sealed/tied bags; larger pieces are okay loose.
- Place packaging foam and food service containers in separate bags.
- Food service containers **MUST** be clean and rinsed.
- No straws, lids, plastic wrap or trash.
- No packaging peanuts.
- No foam insulation.

Drop off is very simple. **Please call before heading over** as their hours are not always consistent.

Directions:

- Highway 880 towards Milpitas
- Exit Dixon Landing Road and head west
- Cross over Hwy 880 and stay in lane that continues straight at the intersection

- Follow road over the bridge; road will turn to the right
- First building on the left is for Styrofoam recycling
- Turn left into the parking lot
- Note: do not drive to the scale where cars/trucks are weighed and charged for dumping
- White door has a sign for 'Styrofoam Recycling Center'
- If the 'room' is unattended, leave the Styrofoam in the bags anywhere inside the door

There are other options within the Bay Area but some charge for this service. Please be sure to check their websites for details.

Want to read more? There is a lot of information out there and it's encouraging to see the number of alternatives that are being produced. Here are just a few articles for your additional information:

<https://www.worldcentric.com/journal/final-verdict-on-styrofoam-ban-in-nyc>

<https://www.worldcentric.com/journal/impacts-and-risks-of-styrofoam>

<https://www.cruzfoam.com/post/top-5-styrofoam-alternatives-and-their-pros-and-cons>

<https://www.doyou.com/10-eco-friendly-alternatives-to-styrofoam/>