



Expanded Polystyrene Food Service Products– Prohibition (Environment & Transportation Work Session)- SUPPORT
February 6, 2019

The Maryland Environmental Health Network supports bills that are consistent with scientific research in the fields of public and environmental health, and those which advance social justice and equity. Marylanders are more likely to achieve health and longevity when we live in environments of clean air and water, strong local economies, and meaningful community engagement in policy-making. As a statewide network we draw on a diverse constituency of health advocates and professionals, educators, researchers, and community members to evaluate legislative proposals.

Expanded Polystyrene is a substance used to make food containers, plates cups and food containers. These products are harmful to the environment over their lifecycle, *because they do not degrade*, but also because they have been shown to remain intact upon ingestion by any species which can affect the fertility of marine species, and can subsequently have harmful effects on humans that consume fish and other marine stocks. As previously submitted to this body expanded polystyrene food service items contain hot liquids by design. Consequently, styrene – **a probable carcinogen** – can leach into the liquid digested by the consumer. Likewise, when hot foods are placed in these containers, as they commonly are at restaurants and carry out establishments, these compounds *can* leach into the food.

Its lightweight properties lend itself to the accumulation of fugitive litter. Polystyrene, parts or whole containers, can easily be picked up by wind— leading to litter in our streets and throughout our waterways. Once it makes its way into our waterways, it can persist there for an **unknown period**, absorbing up to ten times the number of contaminants as similar use disposable products. These pollutant-soaked bits of polystyrene can be consumed by marine life, which poses a threat to our aquatic ecosystem and human health up the food chain.

Finally, studies have shown that the manufacturing process needed to create expanded polystyrene are environmentally harmful in two major ways: they requires a significant amount of energy and produces harmful air emissions.

As an organization focused on environmental health, it is important to note that litter has demonstrated negative effects on mental health and community well-being. Litter and other blight tends to be disproportionately higher in economically distressed neighborhoods, which compounds existing social inequity.

Styrofoam is not inert. Studies have suggested associations between exposure to styrene and low birth weight and reduced fertility. While, other, epidemiological studies suggest that exposure to styrene implicates reproductive hazards, because styrene has been shown to cross the placenta.

While these studies are not conclusive, I ask the Committee to take up the precautionary principle, which urges decisionmakers to defer to actions that do the least harm when questions of human health are still being resolved. With all that is at stake, why are we willfully introducing harm into our supply chain when there are safer alternatives?



Alternatives to traditional expanded polystyrene food products include biodegradable, starch-based service items. Manufacturers and retailers are already making the switch to this type of material and for good reason. These alternatives produce smaller amounts of less toxic waste that can be composted.

Cities across the nation and in this region, have already adopted a ban on expanded polystyrene products. As such, those with greater resources can simply opt out while the most vulnerable cannot. This poses a justice issue for individuals and small businesses inherent in the question of who uses expanded polystyrene products because they have no choice, and because it is cheaper.

Maryland must act in service of greater health for its residents. Implementing this ban is not only a benefit our environment, but also promotes the public health of Marylanders by eliminating exposure to polystyrene and its carcinogenic effects.

Respectfully,

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