



Info Sheet

FACTS ABOUT POLYSTYRENE FOAM FOODSERVICE PACKAGING

- Polystyrene (PS) and the entire plastics industry are part of the solution. The packaging industry has made significant progress over the past decade in reducing content through manufacturing source reduction, and discouraging litter and improper disposal of trash.
- **A Positive Environmental Alternative:** Coffee and tea customers who believe they are doing something “good for the environment” by choosing to use a plastic-coated paperboard cup with a sleeve for one hot beverage instead of a single polystyrene foam cup will be surprised to learn what a peer reviewed life cycle study has shown (2006 Franklin Associates report.) According to this data, for the average plastics-coated paperboard cup versus the average polystyrene foam cup, a plastic-coated paperboard cup with a sleeve results in 50% more energy to produce, nearly twice as much solid waste volume, nearly five times as much solid waste by weight, and nearly 50% more greenhouse gas emissions.
- Bans are likely to hurt locally-owned businesses because they limit choice and increase costs. PS is one of the most cost-effective materials for foodservice containers used by small businesses, costing 2 to 3 times less than paper-based, compostable, or reusable products. When the City of Malibu enacted a polystyrene ban, the local yogurt shop was forced to raise prices to counter the higher cost of paper cups – **an annual cost increase of over \$30,000!**
- In reality, bans are really just a hidden tax on shop owners, who must pass the cost on to their customers. It is believed that any restriction – be it a ban or tax – ignores the real concern, which is litter.
- Many local businesses are willing to do their part to reduce litter – to work collaboratively with the city and anti-litter advocates to implement programs developed to address this important issue.
- PS foodservice ware is being recycled commercially in California and elsewhere – no other foodservice materials (paperboard, composite paper/plastics, or biomaterials) can make that claim. PS recycling is an emerging market and ordinances that ban this material stifle such end-use potential benefits.
- Paper and paperboard make up the highest percent of municipal solid waste (trash) in the waste stream (33.9%), according to the most recent 2008 EPA report. The percentage of other materials in U.S. municipal landfills include food (12.7%); plastics (12%), metals (8.4%); and all **polystyrene (0.7%)**.
- **Very little of the waste in today’s modern, highly engineered landfills (including paper, plastic, food) actually biodegrades.** Since degradation of materials can create potentially harmful liquid and gaseous by-products that could contaminate groundwater and air, today’s landfills are designed to minimize contact with air and water required for degradation to occur, thereby practically eliminating the degradation of waste.
- The industry recognizes and agrees that any foodservice packaging is a blight to the community when it is disposed of improperly. **The environmentally beneficial approach to address the issue is to focus on preventing litter in the first place – through implementing anti-litter programs aimed at affecting behavioral changes that result in measurable overall litter reduction, and involving all stakeholders in the community: business, government, schools, and citizen groups.**
- Bans may change the composition of litter, but they do not reduce the amount of litter since litterbugs do not discriminate between materials. Behavioral change – not a ban or any other product restriction – is a key component to any successful litter reduction program.
- If the goal is to reduce coastal and waterborne waste, then solutions should focus on measurable, replicable, and objective results.