

Proposed Ban on Polystyrene Foam Food Containers Threatens Jobs



OPPOSE

Legislation that threatens thousands of California jobs by banning food vendors from using polystyrene foam food service containers passed the Senate Environmental

Quality Committee this week.

The California Chamber of Commerce **opposed SB 568 (Lowenthal; D-Long Beach)**, which inappropriately bans all food vendors from using polystyrene foam food service containers, ignoring the numerous environmental benefits associated with polystyrene products and threatening thousands of manufacturing jobs within the state.

Proponents of SB 568 argue that foam polystyrene is not recyclable, while replacement products are. Opponents of the bill point out that recycling any package that is contaminated with food waste—whether it is plastic, paper or foam—presents a recycling challenge.

Many communities now are accepting polystyrene foam containers in curbside and/or drop-off recycling programs.

A company in Chino that uses recycled foam to make premium picture frames has grown from a three-person operation to more than 30 employees and has processed up to 500,000 pounds of used foam in one month.

Economic Impact

A study by Keybridge Research on the economic impact of a ban on polystyrene containers in California found that:

- Reduced demand for polystyrene foam food service products in California and resulting plant closures are estimated to result in losses of more than \$1 billion in output, \$222 million in earnings, and 4,800 jobs; and
- The operations of the six polystyrene foam manufacturing facilities in California contributed at least \$6 million to the state in tax revenues.

Environmental Impact

All packaging leaves an environmental footprint, regardless of the material type, as it takes energy and raw materials to produce, transport, and recover or dispose any material.

Polystyrene cups weigh two to five times less than comparable paper packaging products, which mean fewer air emissions when transporting products. In addition, a polystyrene hot beverage cup requires about 50 percent less energy to produce than a similar plastic-coated paperboard cup with a corrugated cup sleeve.

Studies conducted for Seattle Public Utilities showed that banning polystyrene foam food take-out containers would dramatically increase environmental impacts by doubling the greenhouse gas emission, energy use and waste associated with the use of alternative products.

Unintended Trade-Offs

The CalChamber, along with nine other organizations, urged the Senate Environmental Quality Committee not to approve SB 568 as the bill fails to consider potential unintended environmental trade-offs.

Given the present state of the economy, the Legislature should not consider passing a bill that would put more people out of work.

The coalition also noted that “bio based” or “degradable containers” degrade only in a controlled composting environment, which amounts to a large industrial facility where temperatures can exceed 140 degrees for several days.

A litter audit conducted after the city of San Francisco banned polystyrene containers showed that paper cup litter increased after the ban was enacted.

Key Vote

SB 568 passed Senate Environmental Quality on a party-line vote of 5-2 on April 4.

Ayes: Hancock (D-Berkeley), Kehoe (D-San Diego), Lowenthal (D-Long Beach), Pavley (D-Agoura Hills), Simitian (D-Palo Alto).

Noes: Blakeslee (R-San Luis Obispo), Strickland (R-Thousand Oaks).

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