

# FOODSERVICE BUSINESS POLYSTYRENE LEGISLATION



The banning of polystyrene began in Berkeley, CA in 1988. The movement started slowly but has gained quite a bit of momentum in the last few years. The majority of municipalities that have passed this type of legislation ban expanded polystyrene only. However, there are several that ban both types.

## ➤ What is Polystyrene?

Polystyrene is an aromatic polymer that is commercially manufactured from petroleum by the chemical industry. There are 2 types of polystyrene used in the foodservice industry – expanded polystyrene and solid polystyrene. Solid polystyrene is a colorless, hard plastic with limited flexibility and is typically used to make lids or plastic cups. It can be transparent or made to take on various colors. Expanded polystyrene is commonly known as Styrofoam and is typically used to make cups and food containers.

## ➤ How did the movement start?

Disposable foamed polystyrene packaging first became an issue in the late 1980s, when public focus turned to the damage of the ozone layer due to the use of CFCs. The polystyrene industry came under scrutiny for its use of large amounts of CFCs in polystyrene production. The City of Berkeley, CA and Suffolk County, NY, were some of the first municipalities to ban foamed polystyrene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Suffolk County, in particular, was the object of a law suit by the plastics industry in an attempt to stymie the growing number of communities considering polystyrene ordinances. As a result of the unfavorable attention, the plastics industry generated much hype about the recyclability of polystyrene in an attempt to combat such ordinances.

Now, the focus is not CFCs (though their replacement, pentane, is highly volatile), but rather the inefficiency of foamed polystyrene disposable food products from an energy, emissions and waste management perspective. By their very nature, with a use value of perhaps a few minutes if not less, disposable polystyrene food packaging is once again being targeted by local municipalities as an important step in their attempt to reduce the sources of waste and litter.

## ➤ Why can't Polystyrene be recycled?

Polystyrene (plastic #6) is the most difficult common plastic to recycle. Current estimates by the California Department of Conservation peg the costs of recycling polystyrene at over \$3000 per ton, meaning that polystyrene actually has a negative scrap value. Glass, by comparison, costs just \$89 per ton to recycle. All attempts to recycle polystyrene on a large-scale basis in the past have failed, despite industry support, due to the high costs involved. Hurdles to foamed polystyrene recycling include its light weight, which makes it expensive and difficult to transport and the demand that the polystyrene be uncontaminated by food, dirt or other grime.

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## Foodservice Business

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## ➤ What are the effects of Polystyrene on the environment?

Even when disposed of properly, polystyrene can easily be diverted from its track to the landfill by wind or other unforeseen forces. Once in the environment, foamed polystyrene will often enter our oceans, where it becomes a principle component of marine debris. The California Coastal Coalition has found through studies of debris deposited on beaches that foamed polystyrene is the second most abundant type of marine debris. Up to 90% of marine debris is plastic, and most marine debris comes from urban runoff, like fast food waste. The Algalita Marine Research Foundation has found that in at least one area of the Pacific, plastic outweighs plankton by a factor of six.

## ➤ Which municipalities have passed this type of legislation?

In California, 90 cities and counties have passed polystyrene legislation.

Alameda	Fairfax	Marin County	Pismo Beach	Santa Monica
Albany	Foster City+	Marina	Pittsburg	Sausalito
Aliso Viejo*	Fremont	Mendocino County	Pleasanton	Scotts Valley
Arcata	Gonzales	Menlo Park	Portola Valley	Seaside
Arroyo Grande	Greenfield	Millbrae+	Redwood City	Solana Beach
Belmont	Half Moon Bay	Mill Valley	Richmond	Sonoma County*
Berkeley	Hayward	Monterey	Salinas	South Pasadena
Calabasas	Hercules	Morgan Hill	San Bruno+	Sunnyvale
Campbell	Hermosa Beach	Morro Bay	San Carlos	Ukiah
Capitola	Huntington Beach*	Mountain View	San Clemente*	Ventura County*
Carmel	Lafayette	Newport Beach	San Francisco	Walnut Creek
Carpinteria	Laguna Beach	Novato	San Jose*	Watsonville
Culver City	Laguna Hills*	Oakland	San Juan Capistrano*	West Hollywood
Cupertino	Laguna Woods*	Ojai	San Leandro	Yountville
Dana Point	Los Altos	Orange County*	San Louis Obispo	
Del Ray Oaks	Los Angeles*	Pacific Grove	San Mateo County	
El Cerrito	Los Gatos	Pacifica+	San Rafael	
Emeryville	Malibu	Palo Alto	Santa Clara County	
Encinitas	Manhattan Beach	Pasadena	Santa Cruz+	

\* Ban is in municipal facilities only

+ Expanded and solid polystyrene banned

While the vast majority of bans are in California, several municipalities across the US have similar bans.

Amherst, MA	Dennis, MA	Isaquah, WA	Portland, OR	Takoma Park, MD+
Bethel, AK	Folly Beach, SC	Lee, MA	Prince George's County, MD	Topsham, ME
Brookline, MA+	Freeport, ME	Lenox, MA	Seattle, WA	Ulster County, NY
Brunswick, ME	Gaithersburg, MD+	Miami Dade County, FL*	Somerville, WA	Washington DC
Cambridge, MA+	Glen Cove, NY+	Minneapolis, MN	Suffolk County, NY	Westchester County, NY*
Concord, MA+	Greenfield, MA	Montgomery County, MD	South Hadley, MA	Westfield, MA
Coral Gables, FL	Hamilton, MA	North Miami, FL*	South Portland, ME	Westford, MA
Cordova, AK	Ipswich, MA	Portland, ME	St Louis Park, MN+	Williamstown, MA

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