

# Polystyrene Foam

## WHY WE MUST SAY "NO" TO FOAM!

### Polystyrene foam may cause cancer.

- “Styrofoam” — or expanded polystyrene — contains the chemical styrene, which has been classified as a human carcinogen.
- In addition to cancer, styrene has been linked to vision and hearing loss, poor memory and concentration, and an impaired nervous system.

### How am I exposed?

- When polystyrene is used for food packaging, chemicals can leach out into the food.
- This is especially true when foods are hot, acidic, or high in fat.
  - A polystyrene cup used for tea, for instance, will trigger chemical leaching through heat and acidity. If milk has been added, the migrating chemicals will be absorbed by the fat content of the milk

### Polystyrene foam does not biodegrade.

- Plastics — including polystyrene — do not break down in the environment.
- Over time, styrofoam becomes brittle and breaks down into microplastics. The process is accelerated by sunlight.
- Polystyrene microplastics can reach every corner of the environment.
- When styrofoam is placed in landfills, styrene leaches out into area waters, where it can contaminate drinking water.
- In the ocean, styrofoam degrades slowly, and can be mistaken for food by marine animals. After substantial exposure, these animals show toxic effects.



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### **Polystyrene foam is easily littered.**

- Polystyrene is lightweight and breaks up easily. As litter, it is picked up by wind and travels from streets and through storm drains.
- Bits of polystyrene are almost impossible to collect, and can persist in the environment for centuries.

### **Polystyrene foam cannot be recycled.**

- Like most plastics, styrofoam is made of a cocktail of chemical additives that give it features such as shape, color, texture, etc. These are extremely difficult to separate or break down.
- The only technology that can convert polystyrene into anything other than trash is “chemical recycling,” an inefficient and highly polluting process.
- “Chemical recycling” uses solvents and high heat to break plastics down to their chemical elements.
- Chemical recycling is inefficient. It requires enormous amounts of energy to create a fuel that is dirty and toxic, and may often be used only to power the process of chemical recycling itself.
- Chemical recycling facilities release toxic emissions, create hazardous waste, and are prone to fires and explosions.
- After over 45 years of research and development, there are fewer than eleven chemical recycling facilities in the United States, all of which experience frequent shutdowns and are incapable of operating at scale.
- The only chemical recycling facility in the United States capable of handling polystyrene, Regenyx, in Tigard, OR, closed down in April, 2024.

### **We don't need polystyrene foam.**

- Expanded polystyrene is easily substituted for other materials — and has been for decades.
- McDonalds gave up its styrofoam packaging in 1990.
- As of June, 2024, eleven states and over 250 cities and counties in the United States have banned or placed restrictions on polystyrene foam. Yours can, too!

