

# POLYSTYRENE (STYROFOAM) ORDINANCE FACT SHEET

## Contra Costa County Climate Leaders

A project of Generation Green - a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

Find Links to Other Local Government Policy Opportunities at  
[www.cccclimateleaders.org](http://www.cccclimateleaders.org)



### WHAT?

Now that a statewide ban in single-use plastic bags is in place, polystyrene is the next front in the battle against ubiquitous and harmful plastic waste. Polystyrene's story begins in the first half of the 20th century, but it didn't become a staple of our everyday lives until the second half, when world production of plastic resins increased [25 fold](#). Before long, polystyrene was synonymous with take-out food, barbeque plates, and disposable coffee cups—Americans today still use an estimated [25 billion](#) foam cups each year. Even though Polystyrene is commonly known as Styrofoam, that's just a name-brand owned by the Dow Chemical Company.

### WHY?

Polystyrene contains the chemical [styrene](#), which has been [linked to](#) cancer, vision and hearing loss, impaired memory and concentration, and nervous system effects...the list goes on. What happens when you eat hot foods or drink liquids from styrofoam plates and cups is the Styrene [leaches out](#) of the Styrofoam and into our bodies. Like many chemicals, we know about their health effects from worker exposures. [Prolonged effects](#) of chronic styrene exposure that many manufacturing workers face include: depression, chronic headaches, fatigue, and weakness, as well as effects on kidney function and blood.

The EPA released a report that listed the [polystyrene manufacturing process](#) as the fifth largest creator of hazardous waste. There are [57 chemical by-products](#) released during the manufacturing process of polystyrene, polluting the air, land, water and communities that live near the facilities. Styrofoam is no longer manufactured with CFC (notorious ozone-depleting chemical), but still uses HFCs (hydrofluorocarbons) that are still linked to depleting the [ozone layer](#) and affecting [global warming](#).

***As if the public health impact of polystyrene isn't enough, its environmental effects are well documented. It takes 500 years to decompose, and it takes up 25-30% of our world's landfills.*** Our lakes, waterways and oceans are suffering thanks to Styrofoam waste. **Scientists recently [estimated](#) that the world's oceans contain more than 5 trillion floating plastic particles, which have a combined weight of 250,000 tons.**

### WHO?

A number of environmental groups continue to advocate for policy restrictions on polystyrene – including, but not limited to : Californians Against Waste, California Integrated Waste Management Board, Clean Seas Coalition, Clean Water Action, Coastkeepers , Earth911, Environment California, Heal the Bay, SaveSFBay, and Surfrider.



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### WHERE?

The good news is that more and more cities and counties are taking a stand against plastic pollution in the Bay. **80% of Bay Area population is living in a jurisdiction that has banned plastic bags and 62% are living in places that have banned Styrofoam food ware.** [This map](#) shows cities and counties in the Bay Area have already banned the use of plastic bags and/or Styrofoam food containers and what each ordinance entails and this is a [list version](#) (more up to date).

[Sixty-four](#) California cities and counties totaling approximately nine million residents have already enacted local foam bans because they understand the urgency of this issue. Cities with bans in Contra Costa County include Martinez, Pittsburg, Walnut Creek, Lafayette, El Cerrito, Hercules and Richmond. Nearby counties with ordinances includes Alameda, Marin, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Sonoma Counties. The [first Styrofoam ban](#) was passed in 1988 by the city of Berkeley.

In all of these jurisdictions, food vendors provide their take out in readily available and cost-comparable, alternative packaging including, paper, plastic, aluminum foil, and biodegradable and compostable materials, many of which are manufactured right here in California. There has been no indication of adverse business or other negative economic effects related to the banning of foam food ware in the cities and counties that have already done so, as explained [here](#).

San Francisco recently passed the strictest polystyrene ordinance in the United States (to be effective 1/1/18). They unanimously passed an ordinance banning the sale of any product made from the petroleum-based compound including not only disposable dishware but packing materials, egg cartons, mean trays, beach toys and coolers.

In 2012 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the largest school district in the state, announced it would stop using Styrofoam food trays for student lunches. We can listen to these bright young students speaking about why they banned Styrofoam in [this video](#) – these students are articulate, passionate, and above all else, eloquent in their defense of the environment. They understand the perils of the future they will face tomorrow if the problem of disposable, single-use plastic pollution isn't addressed today.

A statewide ban on polystyrene failed in 2012 (SB568) but newly authorized legislation was authorized in early 2017 ([SB705](#)) and is currently making its way through the Senate. This legislation would not be effective until 2020 so there is still work to be done at the local level to reduce plastic pollution in our waterways.

### WHEN?

There are hidden costs to everyone embedded in every piece of thrown-away plastic product. In this case, they include the cost of cleaning up the litter on streets and waterways and the incalculable damage to the marine environment. It's up to us to take action now to as a continued commitment to a healthy and sustainable community for the sake of future generations.

5/30/17

