

# WHAT IS EPS?

Often called "Styrofoam" (which is a trademarked name for a Dow Chemical Co. foam product), the more accurate name for the generic foam in disposable cups, plates, clamshell containers, and packing peanuts is **expanded polystyrene** or **EPS**.

The lightweight, inexpensive material is often used for packaging, and its insulating qualities make it a popular container for food & beverages.<sup>2</sup>



# EPS BY THE NUMBERS



**80%**

of EPS ends up in landfills, where it will sit for **500+ years!**



**20%**

of EPS ends up in waterways, where it threatens wildlife.



**30 MILLION TONS**

of polystyrene is produced each year in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>



**<1%**

of EPS is recycled, due to the cost & difficulty of the process.



**\$7 BILLION A YEAR,**

the estimated hidden cost of EPS foam.<sup>1</sup>

**25 BILLION PLASTIC FOAM CUPS**



are thrown away each year; enough to circle the earth **436 times!**<sup>3</sup>

**63% VIRGINIA VOTERS SUPPORT**




a ban on EPS food & beverage containers.<sup>5</sup>


# ABOUT US




## CLEAN FAIRFAX

The mission of Clean Fairfax is to encourage environmental stewardship & urban sustainability in Fairfax County, Virginia through education, programming, and community involvement. Visit our website for more info on the work we do!

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## LITTER FREE VIRGINIA

Litter Free Virginia (LFVA) is collective of organizations and individuals that are interested in decreasing litter & plastic pollution in Virginia through advocacy, policy, and community engagement.



**Litter Free Virginia**

## LEARN MORE

Find resources & more information on EPS and other litter topics at [www.LitterFreeVA.org](http://www.LitterFreeVA.org).



SCAN ME!

# THE TRUTH ABOUT



# Ex·pand·ed Pol·y Sty·rene

*noun*

a petroleum-based, lightweight, rigid plastic "foam" which *does not degrade* over time.



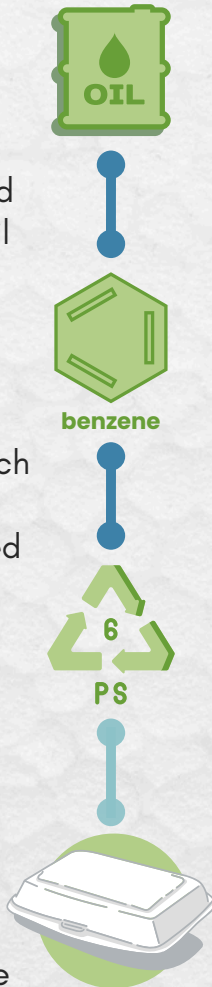
# HOW IT'S MADE & HEALTH RISKS

The EPS foam manufacturing process begins with **benzene**, a known carcinogen derived from non-renewable fossil fuels.

A chemical reaction converts benzene to **styrene**—another hazardous chemical, which has known neurological effects and is a suspected carcinogen in humans.

Styrene monomers are chemically linked to form **polystyrene (PS)** chains, which are treated with a blowing agent, such as **pentane gas**, to create a polystyrene foam.<sup>1</sup>

- Pentane gas is a volatile organic compound (VOC) & is **acutely toxic** for humans.
- At higher temperatures, chemicals can **leach into container's contents** (often including hot food & drinks).<sup>1,3</sup>



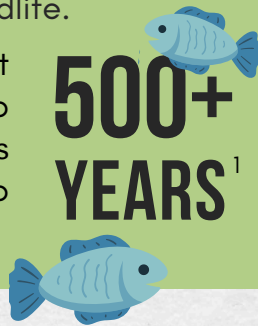
# EPS AS LITTER



Due to its lightweight and buoyant composition, EPS is the "perfect pollutant." It easily blows and floats into the environment, breaking into smaller and smaller pieces.

These crumbs and microplastics are difficult to cleanup, and wreak havoc on habitats. Chemicals may leach into soils and water, and small pieces are easily ingested by wildlife.

Research suggests it may take 500 to potentially thousands of years for EPS to truly biodegrade.<sup>2,3,4</sup>



# EPS BANS

In 2025, Virginia will join **11** states and several major cities (such as N.Y.C., D.C., and L.A.) that have EPS bans.

The Virginia ban is to take effect in two phases: by **July 1, 2025**, food establishments with 20+ locations must stop using EPS containers. By **July 1, 2026**, all remaining food establishments must eliminate EPS.

The ban applies to any food vendors that serve prepared food (restaurants, cafeterias, food trucks, caterers, etc.).

# EPS ALTERNATIVES

Despite its popularity and low immediate cost, EPS is damaging for the environment, wildlife, and human health. Fortunately, there are several alternative materials comparable in price, performance, and convenience to EPS which are less impactful.

## REUSABLES

The **best** alternative to EPS is a **reusable container** (glass, metal, or durable plastic)!

## COMPOSTABLE MATERIAL

Look for **third-party certifications** (BPI, CMA, ASTM) to help ensure that products are *actually compostable* in a realistic timeframe, not merely *degradable*. (Note that these items may take longer to break down in at-home composting). Check with your local commercial composting facility for a list of materials they accept.

## UNCOATED PAPER & CARDBOARD

These materials are easily biodegradable, so long as they are **uncoated** (do not have a sealing layer of plastic on their surface).

## FOIL & METAL CONTAINERS

Clean metal containers can be recovered and recycled many times!

# WHAT CAN YOU DO?



**AS A BUSINESS**, opt to **reduce & eliminate** EPS foam from operations. Data suggests the cost difference between EPS and compostable paper products is **as low as \$0.01** per item.<sup>6</sup>



**AS A CONSUMER**, be selective about where you take your business, **refuse EPS & single-use** items, bring your own reusable containers with you, and encourage local businesses to phase out EPS. Adopting EPS alternatives generally resulted in a **<1% price increase** for consumers to items under \$10.<sup>6</sup>



**AS A VOTER**, press your elected officials to create **policy change** to address the EPS crisis.

**“EPS BREAKS UP, BUT NEVER BREAKS DOWN.”**