

April 18, 2024

Greetings,

My name is Dr. Samarys Seguinot-Medina. I'm a biologist, environmental health scientist and a public health professional. **I submit this testimony in support of HB 354, an act restricting the use of Styrofoam.**

The World Health Organization (WHO), the National Institutes of Health and several states in the US identify styrene as a cancer chemical. The most recent evaluation of this material from the WHO was in 2018.

Polystyrene foam is a public health hazard—it is bad for the environment and our health. Styrofoam has polluted more than any other waste product—despite it being only 1 percent of all waste, it makes up 10 to 40 percent of litter found in streams (CEHN 2024).

Polystyrene foam, aka styrofoam, contains the chemical styrene, which has been linked to cancer, vision and hearing loss, impaired memory and concentration, and nervous system effects and more. When used to hold hot or warm foods, the toxic chemical may leech into the food and be ingested.

More than 50 chemical byproducts are released during the manufacturing of polystyrene, contaminating the air, water and communities that live near these facilities. Polystyrene is made up of multiple units of styrene. Styrene is believed to be a carcinogen (cancer causing) and possible endocrine disruptor chemical by the Department of Health and Human Services and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (<https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/roc/content/profiles/styrene.pdf>) and by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Exposure to styrene can cause irritation of the skin, eyes, the upper respiratory tract, and the gastrointestinal tract. Chronic exposure results in more severe effects including depression, headaches, fatigue, weakness, hearing loss, and disrupted kidney function (CEHN 2024).

Styrofoam may take 500 years to biodegrade; estimated to comprise 25-30% of mass in landfills worldwide; Lightweight makes it susceptible to blow into the ocean or other waterways. Styrofoam adds to the already huge issue of microplastics and plastics pollution crisis in the world seriously threatening food security for us all but especially harming vulnerable populations and poor countries.

There are plenty of safe and cost-effective alternatives available to replace Styrofoam use. Food can be served on compostable plates that are made of plant-based materials. Safer materials include recycled paper and bamboo products and reusable utensils made from corn or potato-based plastics. Store food or drink in glass containers rather than plastic jars and bottles. Never heat food or beverages in plastic. Never heat food in plastic in the microwave, always use glass or ceramic.

For more information please read <https://toxicfreefuture.org/blog/styrene-and-styrofoam-101-2/>

and also take a look at Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) and International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) plastics report released on April 16, 2024 titled “The Arctic’s Plastic Crisis: Toxic Threats to Health, Human Rights, and Indigenous Lands from the Petrochemical Industry”. <https://www.akaction.org/publications/the-arctics-plastic-crisis/>

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Samarys Seguinot-Medina, DrPH, MSEM

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