

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

HB25: Restrict Restaurant Use of Polystyrene

Sponsor Statement

Plastic pollution is an alarming problem. It is forecasted that global production of plastic will reach a total of over a trillion tons by 2050. The United Nations estimates that seven billion tons of plastic waste has been generated globally, with another four hundred million tons produced every year. Less than 10 percent of all plastic is recycled.

Polystyrene, commonly known by the brand name Styrofoam, is a particularly troubling material. Plastic foam has served an important but contentious role in recent history. It is a cheap, lightweight material used in food packaging, packing materials, fishing/docks, and construction. However, convenience and durability are both its greatest strength and its greatest problem. Styrofoam is not recyclable nor biodegradable. Additionally, the chemical additives to the foam that give it its unique properties are not chemically bound to the plastic, so they are prone to leaching into food and the ground.

Non-recyclable plastic foam is a commonly used material for food service ware around the world. In the US, it is estimated that every year 5.6 billion pieces of plastic foam are used, and 22 percent of all U.S. takeout and delivery orders include plastic foam packaging. Without proactive measures, Alaska could unintentionally contribute to growing plastic foam waste that negatively impacts the state's environment, wildlife, and health of its citizens.

HB 25 would no longer allow polystyrene to be used in restaurants and food carts, with certain exceptions. This follows global trends (such as bans in the European Union, Canada, and India) and national trends (with bans in ten other states and the District of Columbia), and it mimics language from bans in the Alaska cities of Bethel, Cordova, and Seward. It would not impact polystyrene containers intended to be reused, such as coolers and ice chests.

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