

# Position Statement on polystyrene (PS) in foodware

June 2020

## Boomerang Alliance supports the prohibition of all polystyrene foodware

Polystyrene is a type plastic commonly used in packaging, where it is utilised in rigid form (PS) or expanded form (EPS). In rigid form, it can be made into all types of foodware, particularly coffee cup lids, cutlery, cups and takeaway containers. Most people however think of polystyrene in its expanded form, (EPS, commonly called 'Styrofoam') which is made from expanding the plastic with air to create a foam. It is often used for packaging fragile products or insulating hot food and beverages. EPS is the most common type of polystyrene used in foodware.

**Boomerang Alliance supports the banning of all fossil-fuel based plastics used in foodware, however polystyrene is a particularly problematic plastic which, in our opinion, should NEVER be used for food packaging.**

The particular issues with polystyrene as foodware are as follows:

- Polystyrene is made from styrene, a toxic chemical that poses health concerns and is 'reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen' according to the [National Research Council](#). Studies have shown that styrene can leach into food and drink from polystyrene containers<sup>1</sup>.
- Polystyrene foodware is a regular litter item. EPS in the environment is particularly concerning as its buoyant nature allows it to float down waterways to the ocean, breaking up into smaller pieces quickly. It can be easily carried by wind, and often blows out of landfill. It ends up littering streets and beaches, clogging storm pipes, and harming animals and marine life.
- Styrene is toxic to wildlife. EPS breaks into bite size pieces quickly and floats, mimicking food.
- While some Australian councils accept rigid polystyrene for kerbside recycling, EPS is rarely accepted because its propensity to break apart means small pieces of it contaminate other recyclables. While EPS can technically be collected and recycled, collection costs are often greater than landfill costs.
- Polystyrene does not break down in landfill. Additionally, due to its low density, EPS occupies a large volume space in landfill and inhibits compaction of waste.

Polystyrene foodware has already been banned in many US jurisdictions, including Maine, New York City, Washington DC, San Francisco and San Diego. The EU will ban EPS cups in 2021. In Australia, South Australia is leading the way by including a specific ban on EPS cups, bowls, plates and clamshell containers in its upcoming ban on certain single-use plastic items.

**In our opinion, the use of polystyrene for use in disposable foodware must stop. Polystyrene can be easily replaced with better alternatives, which are now widely available and cost effective.**

While we particularly focus on polystyrene in disposable foodware in our Plastic Free Places program, Boomerang Alliance also supports a phasing out of EPS used in other types of consumer packaging (e.g. shipped bulk goods), due to the problems associated with litter, waste and recycling. In many cases, it can be easily replaced with moulded pulp or cardboard. Where there is currently no commercially viable alternative for the use of EPS in some specialist applications (such as refrigeration), there should be increased focus on innovation to develop replacements.

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<sup>1</sup> National Toxicology Program, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 14<sup>th</sup> Report on Carcinogens.  
<https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/roc/content/profiles//styrene.pdf>