

# Senate Bill 543: Foam Free Oregon

*Phasing Out Expanded Polystyrene Foodware, Packing Peanuts and Coolers*

## **Single-Use Plastic Threatens Oceans, Wildlife and Public Health**

Globally, 33 billion pounds of plastic enter the marine environment every year and is devastating the world's oceans. Expanded polystyrene is a form of foamed plastic made from fossil fuels commonly used for food containers and packaging. This disposable packaging is usually thrown away after a single use and breaks up easily into smaller pieces that are hard to clean up, disperse rapidly due to their lightweight nature, and can persist in the environment for centuries. Plastic foam is frequently among the 10 most commonly picked up items at beach cleanups<sup>1</sup>, wreaking havoc on the marine environment.

Plastics are a significant source of global greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change, sea level rise and ocean acidification<sup>2</sup>. If plastics were a country, it would be the fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases. Plastics pose a risk to public health, as harmful chemicals migrate from plastic packaging into our food and beverages<sup>3</sup>. Plastics also place a huge financial burden on local communities, who often bear the costs to clean up plastic waste and are exposed to harmful pollution from the manufacturing, use and disposal of plastics.

Expanded polystyrene is not accepted in curbside recycling and is not easily recycled. So-called "chemical recycling" fails to recycle most plastic foam and is a false solution to our plastic problem that exacerbates the climate crisis, endangers frontline communities, and distracts from real solutions like reducing plastic production and transitioning to reusable alternatives<sup>4</sup>.

Worse yet, plastics can contain highly fluorinated toxic chemicals, known as PFAS, that accumulate in our bodies and are linked to numerous health problems. PFAS are used in many consumer products due to their oil, stain- and water-repellent properties. These chemicals are linked to cancer, high cholesterol, reproductive and thyroid problems, and immune suppression.

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Starting January 1, 2025, **SB 543** would prohibit the use of polystyrene foam foodware including bowls, plates, cups, lids, clamshells, or other containers and prohibit the sale of polystyrene foam packing peanuts and coolers. The bill would also prohibit the use of toxic forever chemicals in foodware containers.

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## Single-Use Plastics Cost Business Money

Ninety-eight percent of all takeout and delivery meals are consumed in a home or office<sup>5</sup> where reusable cutlery is readily available, yet most customers are provided with single-use plastic foodware by default. Shifting to reusable foodware can save businesses money<sup>1</sup>. These direct cost savings can total thousands of dollars per year, with the fiscal break-even point occurring within the first year of the transition.

Innovative Oregon companies such as [Bold Reuse](#) already provide reusable packaging to restaurants, grocery stores and other food vendors with easy options for customers to borrow and return packaging. Nine other states have already taken action to prohibit plastic foam including Washington, New York, Maine and Vermont. And several additional states are poised to do so.

We must reduce the production of single-use plastic, including expanded polystyrene, and shift to reusable alternatives for the betterment of our environment, public health and local economies.

### Take Action

Ashland, Eugene, Florence, Lincoln City, Medford, Milwaukie, Newport, Portland, and Silverton have already passed similar ordinances prohibiting polystyrene in food service.

These are a great first step and now we need a comprehensive approach via the Oregon state legislature. That's why we need you to vote YES on SB 543.

### References

1. International Coastal Cleanup and Ocean Conservancy. Together, We Are Team Ocean. 2020. page 15 [https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FINAL\\_2020ICC\\_Report.pdf](https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FINAL_2020ICC_Report.pdf)
2. Center for International Environmental Law (2019). Plastic & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet. Available: [www.ciel.org/plasticandclimate](http://www.ciel.org/plasticandclimate)
3. Muncke J, Myers JP, Scheringer M, et al (2014). Food packaging and migration of food contact materials: will epidemiologists rise to the neotoxic challenge. *Epidemiol Community Health*; 68:592-594; Geueke, B., and Muncke, J. (2018) Substances of Very High Concern in Food Contact Materials: Migration and Regulatory Background. *Packag. Technol. Sci.*, 31: 757- 769
4. See Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, Chemical Recycling Case Study: Agilyx, June 2020, <https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/Agilyx-Case-Study.pdf>.
5. City of Portland Oregon Sustainability at Work (2019). Restaurant Case Study. The City of Portland, Oregon Sustainability at Work; Cioci, Madalyn (2014); The Cost and Environmental Benefits of Using Reusable Food Ware in Schools. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. Document number: p-p2s6-16.



Polystyrene and other microplastics on a beach south of Newport, Oregon. © Charlie Plybon

**THERE'S NO TIME TO LOSE.  
WITHOUT IMMEDIATE  
CHANGES TO THE WAY WE  
USE PLASTICS THE TOTAL  
AMOUNT OF PLASTIC WASTE  
GENERATED IS EXPECTED TO  
DOUBLE IN THE NEXT FIVE  
YEARS.**

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