

Choosing between Compostable Products & Polystyrene Foam (EPS) Foodservice Products

With any disposable foodservice product, there will be environmental tradeoffs. Foam offers the combination of strength, lightness, insulation and low cost, but at a high environmental and social price. Compostable products have great disposal benefits and perform well, but not in every application – and not everyone has access to commercial compost.

So how do you choose?

All About EPS Foam

Plastics are made from oil and petroleum by-products. **EPS is no different – it is made from natural gas, crude oil and styrene, a known carcinogen.**

Oil is our most valuable non-renewable resource.

As the earth's population approaches 8 billion people, using non-renewable resources to make a cup that will be used for 10 minutes doesn't make sense to us.

In 2011, the National Toxicology Program listed styrene as "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen". In 2014, a review requested by Congress and conducted by the National Research Council confirmed this classification.

Foam cups are old school! **Foam conveys a certain look and feel to customers that is less desirable.** Take away foods in foam are less appealing, less upscale, and more wasteful than the same food in a compostable container.

We are not the only ones who know foam is on its way out. **More than 100 municipalities have banned polystyrene packaging.** More and more cities are adopting similar bans.

Foam is rarely recycled and it is not compostable. On average, about 15% of polystyrene actually gets recycled annually. Drop off and mail back programs are available, but most municipalities in the U.S. can't recycle foam because it contaminates their waste streams and is not economically feasible.

Polystyrene is difficult to clean up because it breaks into little pieces and is so lightweight that it gets blown around as litter. It is particularly harmful in waterways and oceans. A study published in 2011 found that 71% of all the plastic flowing through the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers is foam.

Polystyrene does not break down in landfills, it will be there for hundreds of years, exactly as it is today. Polystyrene foam is mostly air, takes up valuable space, and tends to escape in windy areas. It doesn't make sense to landfill our oil after just one use as a foam cup. There are better options.



All About Compostable Products

Compostable products are made from renewable resources, like trees, sugarcane, bamboo and corn. Clear "bioplastics" are also compostable, and are made from sugars found in corn, beets, wheat, and other renewable resources.

Renewable resources, unlike oil, can be re-grown. As global population increases and demand on natural resources intensifies, using *renewable* resources for single-use products just makes more sense to us.

Products made entirely from renewable resources can be tested and certified to be compostable in commercial compost facilities. Compostable packaging helps divert food from landfills. Not only does this relieve pressure on landfills, but it also reduces greenhouse gas emissions since food emits methane (a greenhouse gas 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide) when it rots in a landfill. In contrast, compost returns materials to the earth, reduces water needed for irrigation, minimizes storm water run-off, improves plant health, and decreases the need for artificial fertilizers.

Renewable resources can be used to make products that look and feel just like plastic and work where you need disposable products. This means you don't have to use products made from virgin petroleum or virgin paper.

There are no compostable product bans that we know of in the U.S. and we are seeing more and more people moving towards compostable products, even if they cannot compost. Using these products sends a strong message to customers and aligns with many great marketing strategies.

Many foodservice products are not considered recyclable because there is no infrastructure to collect and reprocess them. Like foam it is possible to recycle materials like bioplastics provided they can be captured, cleaned, and processed economically. However, recycling is not widespread and many of these items are food contaminated, which makes them difficult to recycle.

Unfortunately, not everyone has access to commercial composting – but that does not mean you don't get any environmental benefits from compostable products. Because compostable products are made from renewable materials, we feel they are a better choice than virgin plastics, like foam.

