



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment  
on Senate Bill 543**

**February 14, 2023**

**Jamie Pang, Environmental Health Program Director  
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members–

On behalf of the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC), a nonpartisan, environmental nonprofit that works at the nexus of human health and the environment, I would like to express my support for SB 543, which would prohibit the use of polystyrene foam containers and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in sales of prepared food.

**Climate and health impacts of polystyrene exposure:**

Polystyrene is derived from fossil fuels, and remains a large source of greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to climate change, sea level rise, and ocean acidification.<sup>1</sup> Expanded polystyrene, also known as styrofoam, is easily broken down into smaller particles that remain in the environment for generations.

In food containers, heat can cause styrene to leach from the foam into the food. Styrene exposure is associated with gene damage to white blood cells and blood cancers.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, manufacturing and incineration also places a large burden on local communities who are exposed to the harmful pollution from the manufacturing of styrene. Those living in proximity to styrene refineries risk exposure which, at best, causes eye irritation and gastrointestinal effects, at worst, results in central nervous system dysfunction and could be linked to increased risks of leukemia and lymphoma.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ciel.org/plasticandclimate](http://www.ciel.org/plasticandclimate)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/polystyrene-is-safe-for-food-in-solid-state-less-so-otherwise>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/documents/styrene\\_update\\_2a.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/documents/styrene_update_2a.pdf)



And towards the end of its lifecycle, polystyrene cannot be recycled. It must be incinerated to break it down and is an environmental justice threat. A national analysis of 73 incinerators in the US concluded that 80% of trash incinerators are located next to a low-income community and/or communities of color.<sup>4</sup> If we want true environmental justice, we simply therefore need to stop producing, using, and incinerating polystyrene.

### **Health impacts of PFAS exposure:**

PFAS, also known as “forever chemicals” are used for their grease and water-proofing properties in foodware, and are linked to health impacts such as cancer, immune system suppression, and reproductive issues. PFAS are used in teflon cookware as well as food packaging and bioaccumulate in the environment. It has been found in blood of nearly every American tested,<sup>5</sup> breast milk, and the umbilical cord blood of newborn babies,<sup>6</sup> and polar bears in the Arctic.<sup>7</sup> Without taking action against this dangerous, but extremely common, substance, PFAS will continue to pollute communities from their air and food to their drinking water.

Prioritizing human health over single-use convenience by reducing our plastic production and usage is something SB 543 will help achieve. We urge the Senate Committee On Energy and Environment to support this bill.

Sincerely,

Jamie Pang  
Environmental Health Program Director  
Oregon Environmental Council  
[JamieP@OECONline.org](mailto:JamieP@OECONline.org)

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<https://www.wastedive.com/news/majority-of-us-incinerators-located-in-marginalized-communities-report-r/555375/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.earth.com/news/polar-bears-threatened-by-toxic-chemicals-in-melting-sea-ice/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.saferstates.com/toxic-chemicals/pfas/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.earth.com/news/polar-bears-threatened-by-toxic-chemicals-in-melting-sea-ice/>.