

February 14, 2023

Dear Legislative Leaders:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for SB543. As a master recycler and longtime volunteer mentor with the Eco-School Network, I support the proposed ban on polystyrene food containers as specified in SB543. The Eco-School Network is a non-profit organization that equips parents and students to lead school communities toward sustainability. During the five-week training offered by the Eco-School Network, I mentor new parent volunteers. They often choose to begin their work by promoting sustainability measures in the cafeteria, particularly by eliminating single-use trays and utensils. When my daughter was in elementary school, I also chose to work to eliminate the single-use polystyrene trays. There are three primary reasons I and other parents and schools often look to replace polystyrene trays:

1. **It leaches into food and drink:** Especially when paired with liquid and heat, a Styrofoam container's toxins (benzene and styrene) seeps into the food contents. But even with cold or dry food, contact with Styrofoam is unhealthy. As long as polystyrene for food storage and serving is allowed, a huge portion of our food contains styrene contamination. I wouldn't want any student, with their smaller bodies and still developing brains to be exposed to these toxins, facing unknown injury.
2. **It's everywhere:** Because Styrofoam is so light and crumbles easily, it's almost too easy for it to end up out in our natural environment. Once it's there, it's impossible to remove. Styrofoam will break down into microscopic styrenes and other harmful chemicals, and they will linger in the soil and water for centuries to come. It's an especially serious problem in our world's oceans.

The Eco-School Network hosts a beach clean-up each February at Fort Stevens State park. On the South Jetty, home to endangered snowy plover nesting grounds, we work at a site known as the MEGA SINK. This site has the dubious distinction of one of the highest densities of plastic debris on the Pacific. This year, we hope to beat our current record volume of 536 lbs. of removed plastic. As a volunteer, I can attest that most of the plastic garbage removed is smaller than a 2" x 2" square, and much of it consists of polystyrene beads. It feels great to help save the lives of ocean wildlife, but it is a large problem that our work cannot solve alone.

3. **Even in the landfill, it causes issues:** According to the EPA, as styrene leaches from landfills into our drinking water, it causes numerous health problems. Communities of color and people living in poverty are more likely to live near landfills and factories that manufacture polystyrene. They are disproportionately affected.

Thank you for consideration of these factors when considering testimony and next steps. Polystyrene food containers are an environmental issue, they're a human health issue, and they're an equity issue. It is my sincere hope that we can join the state of Washington in banning polystyrene from use in Oregon.

Cordially,

Celeste Lewis
Master Recycler and volunteer for the Eco-School Network