Recycling Polystyrene Is the Best Solution

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

The industry that makes polystyrene products is committed to helping you recycle those products. Cups, along with foam trays and sandwich clamshells, are already being recycled all over Connecticut and most of the New England states. Numerous schools, businesses, restaurants, including all the Connecticut McDonald's, and institutions have started collecting polystyrene for recycling. For example, Travelers Insurance, Pitney Bowes and Middlesex Memorial Hospital collect their foam food packaging for recycling. Every school day, students all over the state do their part to recycle lunch trays, knives and forks.
To implement the recycling process, to help preserve our dwindling landfill space and to conserve energy and valuable resources, the National Polystyrene Recycling Company was started in June of 1989. It is the nation's first network of polystyrene-recycling centers. By 1995, the company's goal is to recycle 250 million pounds of polystyrene annually -- a goal consistent with the United States Environmental Protection Agency's 1989 solid-waste reduction plan.
Our industry recognizes the need for responsible action for our products. That's why we continue to expand recycling capability. That's why we are eliminating the use of ozone-depleting gases from the manufacturing process. That's why we are supporting the efforts of Keep America Beautiful. That's why we commend the Connecticut legislature in supporting our polystyrene recycling efforts. CHARLES E. BECK Norwalk Mr. Beck is manager of communications and environmental issues for the James River Commercial Products Company and chairman of the government affairs committee of the Polystyrene Packaging Council. E. JAMES SCHNEIDERS Lincolnshire, Ill. Mr. Schneiders is president of the National Polystyrene Recycling Company

FULL TEXT

In response to the article on polystyrene (Opinion page, Oct. 7) and as representatives of the polystyrene industry, we applaud the Connecticut lawmakers' action to promote polystyrene recycling -- foam coffee cups, salad bar containers, meat trays, sandwich boxes and packaging for stereos, televisions, etc.
The law is a positive step in solid-waste management. It prohibits communities from banning polystyrene packaging if a comprehensive recycling effort is being implemented.
The legislators didn't make this decision randomly. They studied the principal arguments -- banning the material versus recycling it -- and decided that recycling polystyrene is the best environmental solution.
The legislators learned that:
*Polystyrene products are being recycled. In fact, it is the *only* food-service packaging that is being recycled.
*Foam food-service products account for less than one percent by weight and volume of the nation's municipal solid waste.
*Garbage doesn't degrade in a landfill. Today's landfills are designed to eliminate moisture and air, the elements needed for degradation to occur. Consequently, whether food waste, paper, glass, metal, plastics packaging or any other non-food material, it will be around for a long time.
*Foam food-service products are not made using fully halogenated chlorofluorocarbons.
Polystyrene packaging was developed to serve consumers' needs. Polystyrene is preferred because it's safe, sanitary, unbreakable, the best insulator, less expensive and lighter.
The industry that makes polystyrene products is committed to helping you recycle those products. Cups, along

with foam trays and sandwich clamshells, are already being recycled all over Connecticut and most of the New England states. Numerous schools, businesses, restaurants, including all the Connecticut McDonald's, and institutions have started collecting polystyrene for recycling. For example, Travelers Insurance, Pitney Bowes and Middlesex Memorial Hospital collect their foam food packaging for recycling. Every school day, students all over the state do their part to recycle lunch trays, knives and forks.

What happens to these recycled polystyrene foam materials? They are converted to home, office, and personal products we use every day, such as garbage cans, trays, office supplies, combs, rulers and pens. The recycled polystyrene is also found in building materials: insulation board (which further conserves energy), lumber and concrete. But for the schoolchildren of Connecticut, their playground equipment may be the most valuable use of recycled polystyrene. Current uses for recycled polystyrene are numerous, and programs are underway for new-product development.

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Last year, the recycling company's first operation, Plastics Again, in Leominster, Mass., removed through recycling 1.5 million pounds of used polystyrene from New England landfills and incinerators. Today, more than 1,100 separate locations are currently recycling polystyrene through the recycling company's centers in Brooklyn and Leominster, and four more are under construction.

The Federal Environmental Protections Agency estimates that all polystyrene packaging accounts for less than two percent of our solid waste by volume and only one-half of one percent by weight. Polystyrene food packaging represents an even smaller amount.

Foam materials are sometimes perceived negatively, because they don't biodegrade. In fact, today's landfills are mostly storage bins; numerous materials are not breaking down. The Garbage Project at the University of Arizona, headed by Prof. William Rathje, identified corn on the cob from 1971, which is technically edible, and newspapers from 1952, which are readable. That's why it is essential that we recycle those materials with secondary value, such as polystyrene.

Furthermore, some people believe that we should abandon the use of polystyrene because it can become litter. This will not address the root of the littering problem, which, as Keep America Beautiful Inc. states, is a behavioral one. Indeed, you will find substitute materials littered over the Connecticut landscape. Our industry supports Keep American Beautiful's approach that promotes litter prevention through public awareness and personal responsibility for a clean, wholesome environment.

To make foam food-service products, manufacturers use compounds to inject air into polystyrene. A few years ago, it was determined that chlorofluorocarbons contribute to the damage of the ozone layer. Even though only a small percentage of our industry ever used chlorofluorocarbons, we took a leadership role and, along with the support of three national environmental organizations (Friends of the Earth, Natural Resources Defense Council and Environmental Defense Fund), phased out the use of fully-halogenated chlorofluorocarbons in 1989.

Most polystyrene manufacturers use compounds that cause no harm to the ozone layer. A small number of manufacturers, because of technical considerations, are still using HCFC-22, a product endorsed by the Environmental Protection Agency because it reduces ozone depletion potential by 95 percent compared with chlorofluorocarbons. Nevertheless, these producers are committed to using substitute compounds that have no potential harm to the ozone layer.

Our industry recognizes the need for responsible action for our products. That's why we continue to expand recycling capability. That's why we are eliminating the use of ozone-depleting gases from the manufacturing process. That's why we are supporting the efforts of Keep America Beautiful. That's why we commend the Connecticut legislature in supporting our polystyrene recycling efforts. CHARLES E. BECK Norwalk Mr. Beck is

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