

A circular arrangement of white styrofoam cups surrounding the text. The cups are arranged in a ring, with some upright and some tilted. The background is a light beige color.

Polystyrene or plastic foam,
more commonly known as

Styrofoam

is cheap and might keep your food hot, but it is one of the most harmful materials around when it comes to the environment and human health.

Making Styrofoam

Styrofoam is made from petroleum, a non-renewable resource. Producing it creates pollution and accelerates climate change.

Styrofoam production was rated as the 5th largest source of hazardous waste by a 1986 Environmental Protection Agency report.

Making Styrofoam also requires hydrofluorocarbons. HFCs deplete the ozone layer and contribute to climate change.



Using Styrofoam

Benzene and Styrene, both possible human carcinogens, are the main components of Styrofoam.

About 90,000 workers are exposed to styrene each year. Regular exposure to styrene can lead to: skin, eye and upper respiratory irritation and gastrointestinal effects. Long-term exposure affects the nervous system, causes depression, headache, fatigue, and diminished kidney functions.

Styrofoam containers are commonly used for take-out food, but if Styrofoam comes to contact with hot, oily or acidic food, or is reheated, chemicals can leach out, contaminating the food and affecting human health and reproductive systems.



Getting Rid of Styrofoam

Styrofoam is not often recycled because it's expensive to clean, transport and store.

Burning Styrofoam releases harmful chemicals into the air, including dioxin. The National Bureau of Standards Center for Fire Research has found 57 chemical byproducts released during the combustion of Styrofoam.



Styrofoam in our Landfills

The limited recycling choices mean that 2.3 million tons of plastic foam produced each year end up in our landfills. This accounts for one quarter of our landfill waste.

25 billion plastic cups alone are thrown away each year. That's enough to go around the earth 436 times.

