

# How long does it take for Styrofoam to break down?

Styrofoam is non-biodegradable, lightweight and breaks up easily. This material is also notorious for breaking up into pieces that choke animals and clog their digestive systems.



*I*t takes about 500 years for plastic foam to decompose. Can you imagine how long that is? Imagine if Christopher Columbus or Shakespeare or Henry VIII had used Styrofoam cups or plates... they would still be present in the environment.

# How long does it take for Styrofoam to break down?

Plastic foam never truly biodegrades and could stick around for over a million years. Wind and rain brings foam to storm drains and water bodies, where it slowly degrades into microscopic particles known as microplastics. These microplastics absorb contaminants like oil and grease and other toxins like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) and PAHs (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons). Microorganisms like plankton consume remnants of the foam and, in turn, re-introduce them into our food chain.

**STYROFOAM  
BREAKS DOWN INTO  
MICROPLASTICS**



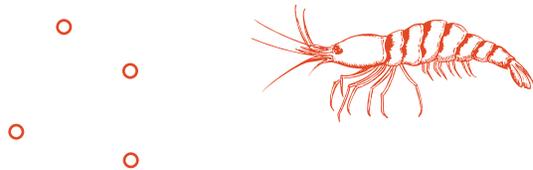
**PLANKTON**



**FISH**



**HUMANS**



**You guessed it:** your takeout order might be flavored with the same stuff as the box it's served in. *Bon appétit!!*

# What can I do?

## **DROP-OFF SITES**

Check Earth911.com to find Styrofoam recycling in your area. Call local sites to make sure styrofoam is accepted and in what form. Most places accept packing materials but not food or medical containers.

### **Foam Pack Industries**

72 Fadem Rd  
Springfield, NJ 07081  
(973)-376-3700

**Accept:** Clean Food Packaging,  
Transportation Packaging

### **Poly Molding Corporation**

96 Fourth Avenue  
Haskell, NJ 07420  
(973) 835-7161

**Accept:** Transportation  
Packaging

## **MAIL-BACK**

If a drop-off site doesn't exist in your area, you can also use a mail-back program such as the **Alliance of Foam Packaging Recyclers**. Remember to remove all debris before breaking it into smaller pieces that fit into a box for shipping.

## **REUSE**

Reuse packing peanuts or donate them to UPS or other shipping stores, who will gladly reuse the material. Not sure where to go? Call the automated, 24-hour **Peanut Hot Line** at 800-828-2214 to find a site near you.

## **SAFE ALTERNATIVES**

Opt for re-usable plates, cups and utensils before purchasing disposables.

When ordering take-out, ask for non-Styrofoam options and encourage the restaurant to switch to paper to-go containers. When shopping, select items that are not sold in Styrofoam containers/trays. Switch to bamboo plates and re-useable utensils, recycled paper, and some corn-based plastics.