



VRA Member: Scott MacDonald
Committee: Policy
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EXPANDED POLYSTYRENE POLICY

Policy Statement

It is the policy of the Virginia Recycling Association (VRA) to encourage efforts that would authorize localities to prohibit or impose a local tax on expanded polystyrene food containers.

Reason for Policy

Expanded polystyrene (EPS), also known as foam polystyrene, is a major source of litter and is a challenge to recycle in traditional municipal recycling programs. When these materials are collected and sent to recycling facilities in Virginia, they are categorized as residue or contamination and disposed at landfills or waste-to-energy facilities. Some customers in Virginia, local municipalities or commercial haulers, are also facing fees or penalties for having these “contaminant” materials in the recycling streams as there are no viable end markets. There is one EPS recycling drop-off in Virginia (Ridgeway, VA), however the company accepts only white, clean, dry, and free of debris EPS with examples such as insulated coolers or protective packaging for electronics, household goods or toys. As such, there are no viable outlets for EPS food containers in the state.

According to a study undertaken by the World Economic Forum, 32% of the 78 million tons of plastic packaging produced annually is left to flow into our oceans¹. EPS is known to persist in the environment, and it is lightweight and floats. Toxic chemicals also stick to the EPS particles and further break down over time into microplastics. These microplastics and foam particles may be ingested by wildlife causing the polystyrene and toxins to enter the food chain.

In regards to human health, styrene, a monomer part of EPS, is “reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen” according to the Department of Health and Human Services National Toxicology Program². Styrene can enter the food and beverage when heated or

¹ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf

² <https://ntp.niehs.nih.gov/ntp/roc/content/profiles//styrene.pdf>

made in contact with fatty or acidic foods. Various states have adopted restrictions on single use plastics in the form of bans or fees.

Who is/will be affected

Members, Public, Food Service Industry, Government, Suppliers, Manufacturers, Recycling and Solid Waste Industries

Definitions

Commodity

A commodity is a basic good used in commerce that is interchangeable with other commodities of the same type. Commodities are most often used as inputs in the production of other goods or services. The quality of a given commodity may differ slightly, but it is essentially uniform across producers. When they are traded on an exchange, commodities must also meet specified minimum standards, also known as a basis grade.

Expanded Polystyrene Food Container

A single-use container made primarily of expanded polystyrene packaging or container that is used in the food service industry for serving or transporting food or beverages. These include plates, cups, bowls, trays, and hinged containers but do not include packaging for unprepared foods.

Recyclable Material

Raw or processed material that can be recovered from a waste stream and converted into new materials.

Recycling Contamination

Refers to the process of rendering a recyclable material unfit for use of nonconforming materials. This occurs when incorrect items or materials are put into the collection system or when the right items are prepared incorrectly.

Contacts

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Document History

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Who Approved This Policy

- VRA Committee 3/20/2020
- VRA Board 5/15/2020
- VRA Members (Meeting)
- VRA Members (online vote)