

# Ban on single-use foodware made of plastic foam filed



A second attempt at legislation has been filed in an effort to prohibit retailers from selling or distributing single-use foodware made of polystyrene foam. (daily herald file photo)

BY JENNY WHIDDEN (JWHIDDEN@DAILYHERALD.COM)

State representatives on Wednesday introduced a bill that would prohibit retailers from selling or distributing single-use foodware made of polystyrene foam, or plastic foam more commonly known by the brand name Styrofoam.

“Our constituents have trusted us with the responsibility of enacting policies that

protect our state's most precious natural resources," state Sen. Laura Fine of Glenview, the bill's primary sponsor, said in a statement. "Passing this legislation is necessary to lighten our environmental footprint, reduce single-use plastic pollution, and preserve our environment for generations to come."

The legislation — in its second attempt after stalling at the committee level last year — is backed by over 35 environmental organizations, many of them local advocacy groups such as Go Green Glen Ellyn and Palatine Cool Cities.

"Single-use plastic pollution is very concerning to me, particularly as a mom of two young kids," said Jacquelyn Casazza, president and co-founder of volunteer-based Go Green Glen Ellyn. "One of the worst offenders of single-use plastic pollution is polystyrene foam, or Styrofoam. We've all seen it. It degrades into these tiny little pieces that blow everywhere because it's so light, so it very easily ends up in our soil and our water."

Casazza, who helped found Go Green Glen Ellyn in 2021, traveled to Springfield yesterday to speak in favor of the legislation.

She was alongside nearly 40 environmental activists who participated in the lobby day organized by the Coalition for Plastic Reduction, a membership of environmental organizations and cultural institutions across the state.

"We don't think recycling is a real solution. We just need to reduce it at the source and stop using it," said Abe Scarr, director of public interest advocacy group PIRG. "The legislation we're working on right now we see as a very incremental but also very important first step at getting the worst of the worst — single-use polystyrene foam."

Scarr added that most plastics don't end up getting recycled, and because they don't break down naturally, they end up as litter "in our communities, in our waterways, even in our bodies," he said.

A global study released by the World Wildlife Fund in 2019 reported that humans are ingesting an average of 5 grams of plastic every week, or the equivalent of a credit card. The contamination comes from microplastics, which are plastic particles smaller than five millimeters.

In Illinois, the plastic recycling rate is 8.1%, according to a 2015 state-commissioned waste report.

That means that over 90% of the plastic used in Illinois ends up in landfills or elsewhere.

"Each year, 20 million pounds of plastic is going into the Great Lakes. We know that a lot of that is coming from Chicago and Illinois," said Iyana Simba, the city programs director for the Illinois Environmental Council.

“We know that the majority of the plastic is single-use plastic, so that’s what this bill is really trying to get at is, how can we reduce the plastic consumption to start with, especially with Styrofoam?”

Nationwide, [eight states](#) and roughly 200 cities and municipalities have enacted bans on polystyrene foam containers.

Simba said polystyrene foam is a particularly difficult plastic to recycle because it is easily contaminated by food and is not available for recycling curbside.

Rather than prohibiting the material, Mark Biel, chief executive officer for the Chemical Industry Council of Illinois, said the solution is to build out a more robust recycling process for it in Illinois.

“Polystyrene is recyclable,” Biel said. “They are easily meltable back down into essentially a reusable monomer, which can then make essentially brand new polystyrene in almost a continuous process.

“Probably the toughest part of it is developing the collection sites for polystyrene, but that is slowly getting built out as more and more people realize that polystyrene is something that can be recycled.”

The bill is also facing opposition from the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association, which similarly opposed the legislation last year.

Donovan Griffith, senior director of government affairs for the association, said polystyrene is manufactured in numerous locations across the state.

“They employ countless folks in the manufacturing process of this material. It’s also a material that doesn’t need to be banned because it’s completely recyclable,” Griffith said. “We don’t need to ban a product that can be recycled for use in future products like picture frames and baseboards.”

While the bill addresses polystyrene alone, Simba said the legislation is just one step forward in reducing plastic use in the state.

“We think (the legislation) could be sort of a jump-off point for a change in culture. I think that’s what’s ultimately going to reduce plastic use,” Simba said. “While this bill does not address all the plastics, I think this will get us to a point where eventually, we can see a world where we don’t have to have some of these plastics.”

• Jenny Whidden is a Report For America corps member covering climate change and the environment for the Daily Herald. To help support her work with a tax-deductible donation, see [dailyherald.com/rfa](http://dailyherald.com/rfa).