

Foam-Free Virginia

Expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam isn't the best choice for people or the environment. It's time to learn about and plan for alternatives.



What's wrong with EPS?

EPS takes at least 500 years to break down. Less than 1% of EPS is recycled, and it takes up valuable space in our landfills.



EPS frequently ends up as litter. It can blow out of your trashcan and end up in rivers and the ocean. Many animals mistake EPS for food, causing potentially fatal consequences.



EPS is primarily made from styrene, a possible carcinogen. Chronic exposure to high levels of styrene can cause liver and nerve tissue damage.



What can I use instead?

Many similarly-priced alternatives are available. You will want to consider factors such as cost, compostability, and recyclability, depending on facilities available in your locality. Options may include:

Reusable Containers



Paper Products (virgin or recycled paper, plant fibers such as bagasse, bamboo, or wheat straw)



Recyclable Plastic (polyethylene terephthalate, or PET)



Foil or Metal



Get ahead of the upcoming EPS ban in Virginia

The Virginia General Assembly passed legislation in 2021 that will ban the use of EPS, otherwise known as foam containers, by food vendors. The legislation also discourages the use of EPS across all industries.

Currently, this ban is to take effect in two phases. By July 1, 2028, food establishments with 20 or more locations must stop using EPS containers. By July 1, 2030, remaining food establishments must comply.

This ban applies to any food vendors that serve prepared food, including restaurants, cafeterias, food trucks, catering companies, and grocery store salad bars.

If you are serving prepared food to customers, you will need to use alternative materials for packaging.

Where can I learn more?

Visit www.deq.virginia.gov/EPS to view additional resources when they become available or contact DEQ at VA-landr@deq.virginia.gov.