

Port Townsend StyroCyclers - Styrofoam Recycling in East Jefferson County Washington

The volunteer group Port Townsend StyroCyclers runs a Styrofoam recycling program in East Jefferson County. They collect Styrofoam that is white, rigid, clean, and free of labels, tape, cardboard, or paper. No packaging peanuts are collected. To schedule a Styrofoam pickup or delivery, email PTStyroCyclers@gmail.com or message them on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/PortTownsendStyrofoam/>.

Polystyrene foam (PS), commonly referred to as Styrofoam and sometimes labelled as plastic type #6, is used to package televisions, appliances, computers, and furniture, and as foodservice packaging, such as egg cartons, beverage cups, food trays, and foam coolers. Because Styrofoam is structurally weak and lightweight, it breaks up easily and is dispersed readily throughout the natural environment. Environmental organizations estimate that Styrofoam can occupy up to 25-30% of landfill space by volume.

Pieces of Styrofoam of all sizes are found along America's roadsides and in our region's waters and on their shorelines. "Port Townsend Marine Science Center recognizes the tremendous importance of recycling polystyrene foam. Pollution from Styrofoam and similar products, particularly the small particles that remain as they break down, threaten the health of the Salish Sea and ocean ecosystems upon which we all depend", says Diane Baxter, President of the Port Townsend Marine Center Board of Directors.

Machines, called densifiers, compact the Styrofoam, which is more than 90% air, into blocks that sometimes weigh 60 pounds. Recycled Styrofoam brokers sell the blocks to manufacturers who would have otherwise used virgin plastic for products such as picture frames, computer casings, and construction materials. In fact, post-consumer and post-industrial polystyrene foam is in demand due to its lower cost when compared to creating polystyrene from virgin materials.

"Our ultimate goal is to have no Styrofoam to recycle, but, in the meantime, we must keep as much as possible out of the waste stream", says volunteer Anita Edwards, who founded the Port Townsend StyroCyclers. To that end, the group is also asking community members to provide feedback to companies that are using Styrofoam (asking for alternatives) and to those that are using Styrofoam alternatives (thanking them for this choice). Environmental activism and resultant restrictions placed upon Styrofoam usage have resulted in increased availability of alternatives such as molded fiber, bagasse (sugar cane fiber), and PLA (polylactic, corn starch)-lined paper.