

Maine becomes first state to ban single-use foam containers

May 1 2019, by Marina Villeneuve



A coffee cup made from polystyrene foam, commonly known as Styrofoam, lies on the side of a road, Wednesday, May 1, 2019, in Augusta, Maine. Gov. Janet Mills signed a bill into law Tuesday, April 30 making Maine one of the first states to ban single-use containers made from polystyrene foam. (AP Photo/Robert F. Bukaty)

Maine has banned single-use food and drink containers made from polystyrene foam, commonly known as Styrofoam, becoming the first state to do so.

Democratic Gov. Janet Mills signed the bill, which takes effect in 2021, into law Tuesday.

Environmental groups have sought such bans amid rising public awareness of throwaway plastic that accumulates in the oceans, but the Natural Resources Council of Maine said that Maine is the first state to enact a ban.

Similar legislation passed Maryland's Legislature in April, but it's unclear whether that state's Republican governor, Larry Hogan, will sign it.

Oregon, Vermont and Connecticut are also considering banning the containers, and dozens of communities from Berkeley, California, to New York City have already passed their own bans, some of which date back to the late 1980s. Several companies such as Dunkin' and McDonald's have also pledged to or have already eliminated foam cups.

In December, European Union officials agreed to ban some single-use plastics, such as polystyrene food and beverage containers, in an effort to curb marine pollution.

"With the threats posed by plastic pollution becoming more apparent, costly, and even deadly to wildlife, we need to be doing everything possible to limit our use and better manage our [single-use plastics](#)—starting with eliminating the use of unnecessary forms like plastic foam," said Sarah Lakeman, Sustainable Maine director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

Mills called it an "important step forward in protecting our environment." The governor said it creates consistency for businesses while providing time to adjust.



In this Feb. 14, 2013 file photo, polystyrene foam soup containers are stacked in a New York restaurant. Maine is banning single-use food and drink containers made from polystyrene foam. Democratic Gov. Janet Mills signed the bill into law Tuesday, April 30, 2019; environmental advocates say that makes Maine the first state to ban disposable foam food containers. Supporters say the law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2021, will reduce litter in the state's lakes, rivers and coastal waters. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

The law will prohibit "covered establishments"—like restaurants and

grocery stores—from using polystyrene containers. Hospitals, seafood shippers and state-funded meals-on-wheels programs will be exempt.

Maine has banned foam food containers at state facilities and functions since 1993. Some communities in the state had also already banned polystyrene.

The legislation faced strong opposition from the [plastics industry](#), food service [container](#) manufacturers and Maine business and tourism groups, which argued polystyrene is economical and a better than other materials at keeping food from spoiling.

Such industry groups argue Maine's new law doesn't mean consumers will stop littering and doesn't ensure alternatives will be better for the environment.

"It is our sincere hope that Gov. Mills and the Maine Legislature will reconsider this legislation next year after they see how it will negatively impact the environment and [local businesses](#) and consumers," said Omar Terrie, a director in the American Chemistry Council's plastics division.

The plastics industry also says they're taking voluntary steps to make plastic packaging reusable, recyclable or recoverable by 2030. The industry in January committed to spending \$1.5 billion over five years to end [plastic](#) waste through a new nonprofit, The Alliance to End Plastic Waste, according to American Chemistry Council lobbyist Margaret Gorman.

"All packaging leaves an environmental footprint regardless of the material type," Gorman told Maine lawmakers in written testimony.

Maine State Chamber of Commerce lobbyist Ben Gilman said the bill would raise costs for [small businesses](#), in particular, while sending a

"chilling message" to companies in the state that manufacture food service containers.

"These types of issues are better dealt with on a regional or national basis due to unbalanced cost impact it will have on Maine businesses," he said in written testimony to lawmakers.

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Citation: Maine becomes first state to ban single-use foam containers (2019, May 1) retrieved 27 January 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-maine-state-single-use-foam.html>

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