# UNITED Connects

The Official News & Marketing Magazine of The United Group® Volume 2014, Issue III

## Rethinking The Ban On EPS

# Study Shows EPS Is Good For Environment

Recent efforts in California, Chicago and New York to ban EPS (expanded polystyrene) products such as packing peanuts and foodservice items are being challenged by environmentalists and industry experts who argue that the bans will do more harm than good.

While EPS foam was once thought to be environmentally unfriendly, a new study "Impact of Plastics Packaging on Life Cycle Energy Consumption & Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the US & Canada Substitution Analysis" proves otherwise. Data from the report, which was compiled by Franklin Associates for the American Chemistry Council (ACC) and the Canadian Plastics Industry Association, shows that replacing plastic packaging with alternative materials would result in 4.5 times more packaging weight based on figures from 2010, as well as an 80 percent increase in energy use and 130 percent more global warming potential.*

The study shows the unintended results of bans on plastic packaging. Glass alternatives come with higher environmental costs in terms of manufacturing, transportation, and even recycling.

EPS foam remains the best shipping material for shock absorption and thermal protection. The same EPS foam that protects wines, meats, and pharmaceuticals can be commercially recycled. Corporations like Chick-Fil-A, Walmart, and Best Buy have launched EPS recycling initiatives that have been hugely successful — reducing their environmental footprints and providing feedstock to manufacturers of recycled content products.

Chick-Fil-A is one of the first restaurant chains in the country to successfully implement a large-scale foam recycling program. With the help of Dart Container, Chick-Fil-A is now recycling foam cups at 25% of its 1,700 locations, and plans on reaching the 100% mark by 2015.

Recycled EPS costs less than wood and is in high demand for use in frames, hangers, interior moldings, surfboards, and other products. Right now the supply of recycled foam is not keeping pace with demand — an incentive for would-be recycling entrepreneurs.

**Waste to Waves** is a recycling program from Sustainable Surf, sponsored by Reef and Spy and in partnership with Marko Foam and Surfrider Foundation. This award-winning EPS recycling program in California aims to recycle EPS into new surfboards. Co-founders Michael Stewart and Kevin Whilden developed a turnkey program that helps keep EPS out of the ocean, beaches and landfills. Waste to Waves collection bins are located at surf shops. From there, the EPS is collected by Marko Foam and densified into bricks, which go to a raw material supplier that reprocesses the EPS into surfboard blanks.

**ReFoamIt®** of Leominster, MA, received the Excellence in EPS Recycling Award from the EPS Industry Alliance March 12, 2014 for its unique off-site collection program and commitment to recycling both colored and foodservice EPS products.

ReFoamIt was launched in 2009 when Barbara and David Sherman began collecting EPS foam to keep a friend's foam densifying machine running. They bought a landscaping trailer and a box truck and set up collection events at various sites. "We transported the foam to [our friend] Ron's densifier, where it was compressed and then sold to manufacturers," Barbara adds.

By January 2013, the Shermans acquired their own densifier and began processing 800 pounds of EPS each day. Their volume outgrew the machine just one month later, and by August 2013 David found a used machine with the capacity to process 800 pounds of EPS every hour. "One tractor-trailer can hold about 38- to 40,000 pounds of densified EPS — and all of it will be turned into new products. Before it's densified, that same amount of foam would fill 50 trailers," explains Barbara.

In 2013 ReFoamIt processed a total of 65 tons of foam. Now the Shermans are working toward recycling #4 Polyethylene and #5 Polypropylene in addition to #6 EPS foam. The company is flexible and will design a program to fit just about anyone's needs. (More information available at http://www.refoamit.com or (508) 872-2323.)

**Dart Container Corp.** is a major manufacturer of EPS foam foodservice products such as foam cups and has been instrumental in the development of corporate EPS recycling programs. Dart can recycle large volumes of EPS, and there are eighteen Dart recycling centers in the US, Argentina, and the UK.

Dart has become the one-stop shop for everyone from businesses to schools to learn how to recycle foam. Through their Recycla-Pak and CARE (Cups Are Recyclable) programs, Dart is spreading the word about foam recycling. Their most recent initiative is the Home for Foam website, which explains how schools, businesses and city governments can recycle EPS.

**Curbside recycling programs** are another important focus for the EPS recycling initiative. California is now offering curbside recycling in 65 cities, catering to 22 percent of its population, and other states have a long way to go before catching up. Dart's *How to Include Foam #6 in Municipal Recycling Programs* and the EPS Industry Alliance's *PS: Think Recycling* are great "how-to" documents on foam recycling.

The EPS Industry Alliance (EPS-IA) has mounted an aggressive recycling campaign and helps companies and municipalities set up EPS recycling programs. Recent attempts to ban packaging peanuts in Chicago and New York may be on hold. According to EPS-IA Executive Director Betsy Steiner, the loose fill may be exempted from the bans based on efforts to expand the existing mailing store take back program run by EPS-IA. (For more information visit http://www.epsindustry.org/.)

ACH Foam Technologies uses a closed-loop EPS manufacturing process and offers EPS customers its own recycling capabilities. ACH Foam also serves as a resource to its customers by providing training on finding large volume recycler when ACH is not able to accommodate their needs. Visit http://www.achfoam.com/Environmental.aspx to learn more. ▮

**http://www.achfoam.com/Environmental.aspx**
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**Franklin Associates, A Division of Eastern Research Group. "Impact of Plastics Packaging On Life Cycle Energy Consumption & Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the United States and Canada". January, 2014. http://plastics.americanchemistry.com/Education-Resources/Publications/Impact-of-Plastics-Packaging.pdf*