



# Carroll County Environmental Advisory Council

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## Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) Reduction in Carroll County

### *Scope*

#### **What is expanded polystyrene (EPS)?**

Expanded polystyrene (EPS) is a lightweight, insulating plastic material commonly used in thermal insulation and food service containers. EPS "is the generic industry name for the white rigid material made by expanding polystyrene beads with steam and pressure to bond the beads together to form blocks or to shape molds. EPS is also used in the construction industry for insulation and void fill." ("Styrofoam Brand Foam vs Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)." *Universal Foam Products*, <http://univfoam.com/styrofoam-vs-polystyrene>. Dec. 15, 2017)



It should be noted that "Styrofoam Brand Foam is a registered trademark of the Dow Chemical Company ("Dow") or an affiliated company of Dow... Most often the word "Styrofoam" is generically used to describe expanded polystyrene foam products like disposable coffee cups, cooler and other foam packaging materials, none of which is actually Styrofoam Brand Foam." ("Styrofoam Brand Foam vs Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)." *Universal Foam Products*, <http://univfoam.com/styrofoam-vs-polystyrene>. Dec. 15, 2017)

EPS food takeout cups and containers are used in a many different industries, including food service establishments or other organizations that serve food as an accessory use. EPS is also commonly used in the form of "foam peanuts" for shopping/packing material. These uses are considered single-use products. Foam peanuts, however, are considered recyclable as plastic #6, but must be clean to be recycled.

#### **Importance of Considering Measures to Reduce Use**

In July 2011, Carroll County unveiled its first postconsumer foam #6 pilot collection at the Resource Recovery Park (Northern Landfill) Recycling Center in Westminster. The free collection service pioneered a new way for Carroll County residents, businesses, and organizations to recycle foam bearing the "6" symbol with chasing arrows.

Carroll County's foam #6 collection site is one of the state's first public sites to accept foam food service containers, including foam cups, plates, take-out containers, egg cartons, as well as shaped or molded foam often used to package electronics. This site will divert foam and



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allow it to be recycled into new products. There's no limit to how much can be brought by the public, as long as it is clean. Once the polystyrene foam is dropped off at the County collection site, and it is then picked up by Dart Container Corporation and taken to its plant in near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Dart reprocesses it and sells it to manufacturers that make new products, such as picture frames and moldings, office desk products, building insulation, and other consumer goods.

Despite Carroll's proactive move to reduce EPS in the waste stream through recycling, only clean EPS products can be accepted for recycling. This means that a significant amount of EPS still makes it into the waste stream, particularly those used for food products. Consumers purchasing take-out food often do not have the ability to clean it before disposing of it. Others simply do not know it needs to be cleaned or want to clean it. A reduction in the use of EPS and shift to alternative products is one additional option for reducing the amount of EPS that finds its way into the waste stream.

### **Legislation Introduced in Prior Sessions**

In 2017, the legislation was introduced in the Maryland General Assembly that would have banned expanded EPS food-service products and packing peanuts in Maryland. House Bill 229 and Senate Bill 186 would have prohibited the sale and distribution of EPS food-service and loose fill packing materials beginning in 2018. Maryland Department of the Environment would have been authorized to grant waivers where this caused an undue hardship or practice difficulty that other businesses in a similar situation were not experiencing. Neither bill passed, but the issue is likely to arise again.

### **Overall Task:**

The EAC will research EPS and potential measures to reduce its use in Carroll County to determine:

- Pros and cons of EPS usage,
- Legislation introduced in prior sessions,
- Status in other Maryland jurisdictions,
- Options for reducing EPS usage in Carroll County,
- Pros and cons of *reducing* EPS usage in Carroll County,
- Potential costs of implementing this reduction in Carroll County, and
- Findings & Possible Recommendations.

### **Work Product:**

A report with findings and general recommendations on potential steps to move forward, if applicable, will be prepared by the EAC and presented to the Board.

### **Timeline:**

Completion anticipated in end of August 2018.