

FACTS ABOUT STYROFOAM

The FDA acknowledges Lagos State's commendable environmental responsibility in banning Styrofoam, emphasizing the imperativeness to reconsider its impact and explore eco-friendly alternatives.

Styrofoam, known as expanded polystyrene foam, is a prevalent choice for food packaging in Ghana due to its affordability, easy of handling, and high insulation ability. It is used as a primary package in grocery stores for fresh fruits, vegetables, meat and sea foods; and in eateries for all sorts of ready to eat foods.

However, Styrofoam food packaging has been linked to leaching harmful chemicals into hot foods, oily foods and alcohol. The main chemical of concern is styrene, which is reported to pose carcinogenic risks to humans. Other concerns of the use of this material is its non-biodegradable nature: it persists in the environment, contributing to pollution and harming ecosystems.

Consequently, 75 countries (ie 38% of the total number of countries in the world), including Ireland and England in 2023, have banned Styrene usage in food packaging materials. Some countries such as some states in the United State of America have not banned the use of styrene in the food industry because research in those areas have revealed low risks to human health. For instance, in 2013 a US stakeholder group shared updated styrene migration data with the United States Food and Drugs Administration (USFDA), revealing extremely low exposures. The estimated daily intake they uncovered was 6.6 micrograms per person per day, which was over 10,000 times below the USFDA's safety limit of 90,000 micrograms per person per day. While tiny amounts of styrene may remain, the USFDA affirms the safety of polystyrene for food contact material. This information underscores the health and environmental concerns associated with styrofoam, incorporating figures to emphasize low exposure levels in relation to safety limits established by regulatory bodies.

In Ghana, ongoing discussions about restricting or banning styrofoam have not resulted in final legislation as there is a scientific data gap on the prevalence of styrene in the Ghanaian environment and how ready-to-eat food handling practices have affected the leaching of styrene or migration into our foods.

The FDA underscores the importance of public awareness to address the risk of styrofoam , hence advocating for informed consumer choices and sustainable practices. Some alternatives to styrofoam include opting for biodegradable packaging, compostable materials, reusable containers, paper-based packaging, and plant-based materials.

These alternatives aim to minimize long-term environmental impact and provide sustainable solutions.

The video applauding Lagos's styrofoam ban serves as a poignant reminder of the need for a broader shift in consumer behavior. By heeding the FDA's guidance, educating ourselves and making conscious choices, we can contribute to a future where eco-friendly alternatives replace potential harmful materials like styrofoam, thus ensuring a healthier planet and a sustainable legacy for future generations.

Reference

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