

Dangers of Styrofoams in Schools

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Styrofoam, or less commonly known as expanded polystyrene is lightweight and 95% air, it is extremely cheap to manufacture and that means it is extremely cheap to purchase which may be the reason that so many people buy it. Polystyrene is a petroleum based plastic and when polystyrene beads are being processed, chemicals are used and steamed to expand them which then make the substance EPS. Not only is the use of styrofoam bad for the environment because it does not decompose but the actual manufacturing process causes air pollution because majority of the chemicals used can be toxic. Along with the pollution in the air affecting our health, the actual styrofoam itself may be contaminating the food that we are consuming, this is especially prevalent when heating food while it is still in styrofoam. When styrofoam is heated the chemicals can be transmitted into our food and may cause reproductive issues in the future. People are often tempted to buy styrofoam plates, cups and other dishware, especially when holding events for many people because it is much cheaper to do so, but despite the larger cost of paper or reusable dishware it is overall worth the investment to avoid the possible health risks.

Although this is a global issue, it is evident that we are contributing to these problems locally. St. Ignatius alone uses roughly 300 articles of styrofoam daily. This number sufficiently increases due to school



Image of Styrofoam items.

events and accommodations the school supplies. For example, the lunch program, cafeteria, lunch market, tea days and information night. Mrs. Vieira, the hospitality teacher and food event coordinator, claims that she is not able to make a school wide impact. This is because she not have full control over specific areas of the school that deal with waste. However she has made a conscience effort to reduce and or eliminate the amount of styrofoam used in the events and areas she is responsible for. She does this by cleaning empty containers and reusing them. She also mentions the reasoning behind the use of styrofoam within the school. Stating that it is a cheaper alternative opposed to more disposable materials like paper. At a supermarket in the Thunder Bay area, 50 styrofoam plates run for \$1.99. Through comparison, paper plates are 750% more expensive, purchased at \$4.49 for only 15 plates. Since St. Ignatius is a green school, they should honour that title and convert to using more environmentally friendly waste products. Paper is a suitable material that fits the necessary criteria, in regards to the use of the

product and the environmental impact. However it is still not ideal. Mrs. Vieira suggests that they invest in reusable dishware to use school wide, such as ceramic or heavy duty plastic. She has already implemented these changes into her own classroom and has recognized how “they are not hard changes” and that, “As soon as you ban something, people are forced to do the alternative.”.



Images: Price difference of styrofoam and paper plates. Image taken by Victoria Zieroth.

To resolve this issue, many things must go into consideration. First thing to consider, is persuading the school body to convert to reusable dishware rather than disposable materials. By having a part of the school body not follow the movement, disposable material will still be in use at

the school and our result will not be at full potential. It is crucial to have someone with power inside the school to support the idea. Mr. Filipetti, principal at St. Ignatius High School, believes that our school should be using reusable dishware for everyday use. He wants to encourage students to bring reusable dishware to school rather than styrofoam and other disposable materials. Filipetti states, “Once we can establish a system for proper cleaning and handling, I believe it would be a good investment for our school to buy reusable dishes to replace styrofoam.” To begin to resolve this issue locally at St. Ignatius High School, research was done to find how much styrofoam is used daily. As mentioned before, roughly around 300 items of styrofoam is used daily at the school. With that, research is now to be done to find the cost of a dishwasher. A fast dishwasher would be very beneficial so that there is less labour and so that more plates can be used in quicker time. With a purchase of a dishwasher, a location for the dishwasher would also have to be found. Ideas for location of a dishwasher includes the lunch perch, cafeteria, or the hospitality and tourism classroom. Once this research is done, and the school finds a location for the dishwasher, Filipetti will now be able to search and make the investment on sturdy, heavy-duty, and not too expensive reusable plates to replace styrofoam in the cafeteria, lunch markets, and school events, such as grade eight barbecue night and information night. With this knowledge, there is still hope that this issue can be resolved if the passion and effort is present.

Works Cited

"Can You Microwave Styrofoam?" *Gadget Review*. N.p., 11 Nov. 2016. Web. 20 Mar. 2017.

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Price Difference Photos Victoria Zieroth