



## Styrofoam ban makes impact

By John Upton  
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SAN FRANCISCO — The amount of Styrofoam that litters San Francisco has fallen by one-third from last year, according to city officials who credit the decrease to a successful ban of the damaging plastic in take-out packaging.

In November 2006, The City barred restaurants from serving food or drinks out of the uncompostable and unrecyclable plastic. In audits of 2,200 of The City's 4,500 restaurants since the ban began — with fast-food outlets among the first to be targeted — roughly 400 were caught using the contraband packaging.

But since then, more than 390 have mended their ways, according to figures provided by Department of the Environment spokesman Mark Westlund.

The City recently issued \$100 fines to the eight eateries that continued to use polystyrene foam despite repeated warnings, according to Westlund. The fines do not need to be paid by restaurants if they switch to compostable or recyclable containers, he said.

Most of the rule-breaking eateries stopped using the banned packaging following visits and letters from city staff, the Department of Environment Director Jared Blumenfeld said.

"Their customers quite frankly complain more than we do," Blumenfeld said. "They're like, 'Why is there still Styrofoam here?'"

The ban appears to have had a significant impact: Researchers drafting an annual litter report have found the amount of polystyrene foam strewn across The City fell 36 percent in the last year, according to San Francisco commercial recycling coordinator Jack Macy.

Much of the remaining polystyrene foam that litters The City comes from packing material and from instant noodles and other products sold at grocery stores, according to Macy.

The lightweight foam can't be recycled or composted and it creates litter problems and health dangers, according to Macy.

"People are getting poisoned by it," Macy said. "Styrofoam has neurotoxic and carcinogenic styrene that's used in its production and studies have found that it leaches out of the foam cup or container into hot food or drink."

The Golden Gate Restaurant Association continues to support the ban, Executive Director Kevin Westlye said.

"The alternative products are affordable," Westlye said. "Restaurants have adjusted and moved on."

By the numbers (*Source:* [San Francisco Environment Department](#))

- **4,500** Restaurants in The City
- **2,200** Restaurants audited after polystyrene foam ban
- **400** Restaurants caught violating the ban
- **8** Restaurants given \$100 tickets after warnings ignored
- **36%** One-year drop in polystyrene foam