

Rhode Island's Polystyrene Foam and Plastic Stirrers Ban: A Guide for Businesses

Effective January 1, 2025, food service establishments are not allowed to prepare, sell, process, or provide food or beverages in or on a **disposable food service container that is composed in whole or in part of polystyrene foam**.

This includes one-time use containers, bowls, plates, trays, cartons, cups, lids, sleeves, stirrers, or other items designed to be used to contain, transport, serve, or consume prepared foods.

Food service establishments providing beverages at a facility or function may not provide **plastic beverage stirrers**.

Violators may be fined up to \$100.



What is Polystyrene Foam?

Polystyrene foam is a light weight closed-cell foam. Under Rhode Island law, it includes blown polystyrene and foams made from expanded or extruded styrene.



Who is Affected?

This law impacts **covered establishments** which includes but not limited to **food service establishments** (as defined in [§ 21-27-1](#)). Nearly all facilities that serve food are impacted.

The following establishments are **exempt** from this ban:

- A boarding home, retirement home, an independent living facility, an assisted living facility, or a nursing home;
- A food pantry, church, or community organization that provides food or beverages without charge;
- A farmer's market;
- A hospital or "meals on wheels" establishment that provides meals at dispersed locations from central kitchen facilities and is funded in whole or in part directly or indirectly by or through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services; and
- An agricultural fair that is held annually at a set location in a county to exhibit local agricultural products and livestock.

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What is Prohibited?

- **Preparing** food and beverages in polystyrene foam containers.
- **Selling** food and beverages in polystyrene foam containers.
- **Processing** food using polystyrene foam containers.
- **Providing** food and beverages to customers in polystyrene foam containers.
- Providing **plastic beverage stirrers** in facilities and at functions in Rhode Island.



Polystyrene foam coolers or ice chests that are used for processing or shipping of food are allowed.

What are the Alternatives?

Food service establishments can use any container that does not contain expanded polystyrene foam. Alternatives include aluminum, rigid plastics, paper, glass, biobased, and compostable items.

Organizations are encouraged to **explore sustainable alternatives**, such as paper or cardboard containers made from recycled materials and biodegradable or compostable containers.

When considering alternatives, remember that food packaging made with PFAS is not allowed in Rhode Island, as of July 31, 2024. Learn more about PFAS in food packaging in the [Toxic Packaging Reduction Act](#).



Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Food Protection
For more information, call 401-222-2750