

Polystyrene Product Alternatives

The recent emphasis on polystyrene bans indicates that less and less of these types of products are likely to be encountered by each of us in the coming years. While these bans support protecting the environment, they also will require us to find replacements or alternatives to the polystyrene products we use. To help with this process, we have outlined a few alternative materials or strategies below that may ease the burden in shifting away from Styrofoam. For example, some biodegradable alternatives were featured at the [2018 NIH Green Labs Fair](#). Additionally, many companies that still use polystyrene packaging materials have created return programs, so their polystyrene can be reused. Since we are still likely to encounter polystyrene, programs like these help to lessen the amount of waste that is created.

Styrofoam Item	Recommended Alternative
Clamshell Container	Clamshell containers can also be made from other plastic materials, such as polyethylene terephthalate (PETE). These containers can generally be recycled, for example PETE clamshell containers are accepted by Montgomery County and many other recycling facilities. ¹ Containers made from paper materials, such as paperboard and molded pulp are also a strong option since they will decompose in a landfill if they cannot be recycled. Lastly, you could consider reusable containers to help reduce waste generation.
Bowl & Plate	Reusable bowls and plates are likely the best alternative to Styrofoam items. Many of us already own these items and they can provide hundreds of uses before being discarded. It may be helpful to bring a plate or bowl to your office for lunch and snacks! A secondary option is paper plates and bowls.
Egg Carton	The most likely alternatives to Styrofoam egg cartons are from cardboard or molded pulp options. Cardboard egg cartons can often be recycled (like in Montgomery County and Baltimore City) and molded pulp cartons can be composted. ²
Cup	Cups, similar to bowls and plates, are best replaced with reusable items, like a glass cup or ceramic mug. There are also a variety of disposable cups options, made from PETE or paper, that can be recycled in the event a reusable cup is not an option.
Packing Peanuts	Packing peanuts and other forms of loose-fill packaging have a variety of eco-friendly options. Biodegradable packing peanuts and air pillows are an option, along with alternatives that are designed to be recycled. You could also keep your packing peanuts to reuse them or participate in a peanut reuse program, such as at The UPS Store .

* Note: Whenever recycling, it is crucial that the items are clean and empty. This means that recyclables cannot be soiled by food, paint, chemicals, etc. Soiled items should be placed in the trash to reduce contamination of recyclables. The items that can be recycled also vary significantly from one recycling facility to another. You should obtain information about the acceptable recyclables in your area before attempting to recycle an item.

Which items are acceptable on or near your NIH campus?

For information regarding recycling on campus, please consult the [Recycling Contact List](#). For the counties surrounding these campuses, the information is linked below:

Bayview Campus ([Baltimore City](#))

Bethesda, Shady Grove and Poolesville Campuses ([Montgomery County](#))

Fort Detrick Campus ([Frederick County](#))

Research Triangle Park Campus ([Durham County](#))

Rocky Mountain Labs Campus ([Ravalli County](#))