

Connecting Innovation and Community through Styrofoam Recycling

In the early 1940s, the Dow Chemical Company was on the search for a material that could replicate rubber, but what they happened upon instead was a way to make a lightweight, water-resistant and bouant product that, by the second World War, was proving a valuable invention for life vests and flotation devices for the army.

Fast forward 80 years and Styrofoam has become a main stay in our everyday world. From packing materials to insulation, it plays a major role in our lives. But it has created its own challenges too. The inexpensive, durable material that has proved such a benefit to retailers and consumers offers an even greater challenge when the product has finished its work. From 2002 to 2015, more than 316 million metric tons (and for nearly weightless product, that's quite a lot) were produced globally and nearly half found their way straight into the garbage. Were it banana leaves, there would not be much cause for concern,

but for a product that is estimated to take between 5,000-10,000 years to biodegrade, that's a quite a problem.



Making an Impact Locally

Until recently, if a company or resident in Auburn wanted to recycle their Styrofoam products, the closest option was through

StyroRecycle in Kent. But that all changed in 2017 when Safeway/Albertsons decided to take their environmental stewardship to a new level.

With a cental distribution center in Auburn that serves all stores througout Washington and Alaska, the company found that the volume of materials coming from their hub was beginning to overwhelm the capabilities of StyroRecycle. The solution? Take matters into their own hands.

In 2017, Safeway/Albertsons became one of only two companies in Washington to own and operate a Styrofoam Densifying Machine.

The process of recycling Styrofoam is pretty innovating while at the same time reduces space and promotes reuse. The Styrofoam Densifying Machine first crushes and then heats the Styrofoam through three different oven-like devices. Once heated into a semi-liquid state, it is formed into what is known as an "ingot". Safeway/Albertsons can reduce 80 cubic feet of Styrofoam down into a 2-cubic foot ingot. These ingots are

then used by various manufactures to make composite items such as picture frames.

Today, Safeway/Alberton's diverts 45,000 lbs. of Styrofoam out of Washington landfills annually.

Due to the nature of Styrofoam being quite bulky and yet light, this weight can be misleading. In volume, this is the equivalent of diverting 60 truckloads that are each the size of a Safeway/Alberton's semi-trailer (53 feet long) filled with Styrofoam each year.

Earlier this year, the City of Auburn partnered with Safeway/Albertsons to provide two collection events for the Auburn public, collecting over 4,500 cubic feet of Styrofoam (approximately one 53 foot long semi-trailer). Safeway/Albertsons will again provide two events in January 2020 to help Auburn residents responsibly recycle their Styrofoam for FREE on Saturday, January 4 & Sunday, January 12.

Safeway/Albertsons has found that the local communities are very excited to participate in all recycling programs and events that are facilitated through other stores and Distribution Centers.

The participation from the public in their shopping bag recycling programs, Styrofoam collection events, etc. has always been very positive and they are grateful for the opportunity to provide an outlet for these items.



Styrofoam densifier machine



A styrofoam ingnot



Pallet of styrofoam ignots

46,510 TONS DIVERTED FROM WASHINGTON LANDFILLS

Products Recycled Locally by Safeway/Albertsons (annual tonnage/weights)

- Baled cardboard – 72,000,000 lbs. (36,000 tons)
- Meat and Grease scraps/refuse from the Butcher and Deli departments – 4,500,000 lbs. (2250 tons)
- Plastic film wrap – 2,900,000 (1,450 tons)
- Organic materials (aged produce/rinds/skins from fresh cut fruits & vegetables – 38,000,000 (1,900 tons)
- Bread to Feed Program – (bakery stale product that was not able to be donated to a Food Bank, was send to an Animal Food Manufacturer)- 760,000 lbs. (380 tons)
- Styrofoam- 45,000 lbs. (22.5 tons)

Safeway/Albertsons Auburn Recycle Center

- 35,000 square foot facility at the Auburn Distribution Center campus that is solely dedicated to recycling.
- 30 full time employees
- Recycle Center is open 24 hours per day/7 days per week.
- 40,000 trailers offloaded each year with some type of recycling material
- 4,200 Shipping containers offloaded each year from our Anchorage, AK Distribution Center that sends recyclable material back to Auburn that there is no existing outlet for in the State of Alaska.

REDUCED GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSION
MILLIONS OF POUNDS OF FOOD DONATED
FEWER TRUCKS ON THE ROAD

RECYCLE YOUR STYROFOAM IN JANUARY!

January 4
10:00am-5:00pm
Safeway
101 Auburn Way S

January 12
10:00am-5:00pm
Albertsons
4101 A Street SE



Christmas Tree Collection Event JANUARY 6-10, 2020

Residential and multifamily customers who live within the city limits of Auburn can compost their Christmas tree and wreath at no additional charge.

Business customers who have compostables services can place their cut up tree in their compostables cart for collection.

Visit auburnwa.gov/solidwasteevents for more details and set-out guidelines. Decorated or flocked trees can not be composted.

