

## The Ins and Outs of (Styro)Foam Recycling

Community Collection Days are semi-annual events organized by the Department of Public Works and supported by the Arlington Recycling Committee (ARC) that bring out Arlingtonians dedicated to the idea that our planet is not a bottomless waste receptacle, and that part of our household solid waste can, quite possibly, be someone else's treasure. These residents think "way beyond the blue bin," according to ARC co-chairman Gordon Jamieson.

Being a new volunteer with the ARC, I asked to work a couple of shifts at the May 2014 Collection Day, and specifically requested the Styrofoam™ gig. What could be more evil for our planet than discarded Styrofoam™? It must take centuries for it to break down in a landfill, I thought. And even though Arlington trash is incinerated, I wasn't much happier about burning huge chunks of Styrofoam™ if there was an alternative.

I worked alongside a staff person from Re-Foam-It™, who brought a 16-ft box truck and educational materials for the public. Re-Foam-It™ takes clean foam and compresses it into 50 lb blocks at their Leominster plant. The blocks are then sold into a material supply chain that serves manufacturers of plastic items such as disposable pens and other every-day goods.

Here's what I learned that day:

- There are several different kinds of foam. What we call "Styrofoam™" is a trademark name for polystyrene and it is marked with the #6 in the recycling triangle and usually includes "PS" underneath. Markets are growing for #4 polyethylene and #5 polyfoam. And there are two kinds of #6 polystyrene – the hard foam for packing material and soft foam for food containers.

- Re-Foam-It™ prefers that you separate FOOD-related polystyrene and the more rigid, white polystyrene used for protective packaging for electronics and other fragile items.

- The soft polystyrene comes in several colors including white, green, yellow and black. These are the trays used for meat, poultry and seafood at most supermarkets or foam egg containers. Foam coffee cups are also part of the softer, food-related polystyrene category.

- Further, for food-related polystyrene items, the triangular recycling symbol with the #6 inside MUST be visible to the recycling team. Thus, it's preferable to not split a foam egg container into two pieces, where one half will not have the recycling symbol on it. That unmarked piece will not be accepted.

- And as noted above, mixed polystyrene is not accepted. So, for example, a typical

Dunkin Donuts foam cup (with the printed DD logo) is accepted. But the McDonalds McCafe foam cup that has a glued-on colorful paper covering is not accepted.

- Lastly, clean is always best, as with all recyclables. It just makes the downstream processing easier, and yields the best price for the bulk material when the processor sells it.

Who would have thought that so many Arlington residents are saving their foam for up to six months so it can be properly disposed of at a Collection Day? The flow of residents toting their saved-up foam continued at a steady pace all day long. They seemed thrilled to have the opportunity to dispose of it in a win-win manner with Re-Foam-It™.

Solid waste professionals prioritize Recycle after Reuse, Repurpose, and Reduce. So, if you must use and/or bring foam into your home as part of your food purchases, or in the form of packaging, please remember to sort it and save it for the next Community Collection Day on Saturday, November 15, 2014. The town website will have all the information about the event at [www.arlingtonma.gov/recycle](http://www.arlingtonma.gov/recycle).

For more information about Re-Foam-It™, you can visit their website at [www.refoamit.com](http://www.refoamit.com) to see a detailed list of what they accept. Be sure to keep an eye out this fall for more details about Community Collection Day where we will be able to collect all three foams: #6, plus #4 and 5. Just remember not to split containers in half so sorting is foolproof.

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Arlington Recycling Committee