MYTHS vs. FACTS

THE TRUTH ABOUT FOODSERVICE PACKAGING

Every day, people enjoy prepared foods and beverages using safe and sanitary foodservice packaging. As they rely more on these products — thanks to their on-the-go lifestyles — there's more attention on those paper and plastic cups, take-out containers and other single-use items. Sometimes, however, information being shared is either outdated or inaccurate. The Foodservice Packaging Institute has collected some of the most common myths about foodservice packaging and provided more factual information.

RELATED TO LITTER AND MARINE DEBRIS

MYTH The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is the result of plastic packaging, including bottles and straws.	**FACT** Not at all. According to a 2018 study published in Scientific Reports, fishing nets account for 46 percent of the trash in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Most of the remaining garbage is composed of other gear from the fishing industry, including ropes, oyster spacers, eel traps, crates and baskets.
MYTH Plastic straws are one of the most common items found on beaches.	**FACT** That's actually true. According to Ocean Conservancy's 2018 International Coastal Cleanup report, straws ranked #7 in the top 10 list of items found on beaches around the globe, making up about 3% of total trash found during beach cleanups. Regional differences may be seen: in the U.S., straws came in #5; #6 in Canada; #8 in the UK and #10 in Hong Kong.

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RELATED TO LITTER AND MARINE DEBRIS (continued)

MYTH Americans use 500 million plastic straws a day, and they end up in the oceans.	**FACT** According to multiple sources, the estimate of 500 million straws a day is incredibly inflated. Cut that number in half, and that's closer to a more realistic estimate. As for the notion that most straws end up in the ocean, that doesn't even make sense, considering the geography of the U.S. and Canada. The vast majority of straws end up in landfills, and while that is not ideal, it's better than being improperly disposed on land or in waterways.
MYTH Our love affair with single-use items plays a major role in the global marine debris problem.	**FACT** Not even close. According to the report "Plastic Waste Inputs from Land into the Ocean" published in *Science* in 2015, over half of all marine debris comes from six Asian countries: China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The U.S. came in 20th on the list, and Canada was 112th. Similarly, the 2017 study "Export of Plastic Debris by Rivers into the Sea" published in *Environmental Science and Technology* found that 10 rivers are responsible for roughly 90 percent of the global input of plastic into the sea. These rivers include the Yangtze, Yellow, Hai, Pearl, Amur, Mekong, Indus and Ganges Delta in Asia, and the Niger and Nile in Africa.
MYTH Cups and take-out containers made from foam polystyrene (frequently, but incorrectly, referred to as "Styrofoam") are commonly littered items.	**FACT** According to Keep America Beautiful's 2009 "National Visible Litter Survey," foam foodservice packaging didn't even make the Top 10 list of items littered on U.S. roadways.
MYTH Banning single-use items like foam cups and take-out containers will reduce litter.	**FACT** Bans simply change the composition of litter streams, not reduce it. San Francisco conducted litter audits before and after they banned foam polystyrene foodservice packaging in 2008. The audits showed a reduction of approximately 30 percent in littered foam cups, but a roughly 30 percent increase in littered paper cups.
MYTH Requiring the use of compostable foodservice packaging will reduce litter.	**FACT** Compostable foodservice packaging will not degrade and magically disappear when littered. These items are designed to compost in a managed facility over several months — not in your backyard, on the sides of roadways or in waterways. And, since these items may be on the road for an extended period of time if littered, it may lead to more litter. Keep American Beautiful's 2009 "Littering Behavior in America" study found that litter begets litter — the mere presence of litter encourages additional litter.

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RELATED TO DISPOSAL/RECYCLING/COMPOSTING

MYTH Foodservice packaging is overrunning our landfills because of high usage and its inability to break down.	**FACT** First, almost nothing breaks down in a landfill. Landfills were designed to entomb materials. Their lack of air, water and light means items are buried and never degrade. Second, very little of what is sent to landfills is foodservice packaging. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's annual waste characterization studies, paper and plastic foodservice packaging accounts for less than 2 percent of materials discarded by weight.
MYTH Plastic bags can't be recycled.	**FACT** Plastic bags can be recycled, but they shouldn't be placed in curbside bins because they can damage the equipment in recycling facilities. Instead, plastic bags should be deposited at special drop-off locations like grocery stores, where the bags will be collected and recycled separately. For more details, go to www.plasticfilmrecycling.org.
MYTH Paper cups can't be recycled.	**FACT** Paper cups can be recycled, but in limited locations. Work is ongoing with communities, recycling facilities and paper mills to expand the opportunities to collect and process these materials and recycle them into things like tissue, toilet paper cores and pulp used to make new cups. For more details, go to www.recyclefsp.org.
MYTH Foam cups and containers can't be recycled.	**FACT** Foam polystyrene cups and containers can be recycled, but in limited locations. Work is ongoing with communities, recycling facilities and plastic end markets to expand the opportunities to collect and process these items and recycle them into things like tape rolls, hangers and raw materials used to make new foam cups and containers. For more details, go to www.recyclefoam.org
MYTH Plastic straws can't be recycled.	**FACT** Now that's actually true (for now). While most straws are made out of a recyclable material (polypropylene), their small size and shape are not compatible with today's recycling facilities. Even if you can't recycle straws, please dispose of them properly in the trash — and not improperly on land or in waterways. Or, if they are made of a compostable plastic, please compost them.
MYTH Compostable foodservice packaging doesn't actually compost — or there's no place to compost it.	**FACT** Compostable foodservice packaging made from paper and plant-based plastics do indeed compost, but since each composter is different, composters will want to double check the compatibility of the packaging with their operations. As for places to compost foodservice packaging, the industry is working to expand the infrastructure to compost these valuable materials. For more details, go to www.recyclefsp.org or contact your local municipality to find out what can be composted in your area.

MYTHS VS. FACTS: THE TRUTH ABOUT FOODSERVICE PACKAGING

RELATED TO MATERIALS USED IN FOODSERVICE PACKAGING

MYTH Chemicals can leach out of foodservice packaging and into the food or beverage being consumed.	**FACT** It's true that chemicals used in foodservice packaging may migrate into the foods or beverages. That's why organizations like the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada review any chemicals that could possibly come in contact with foods. These regulators review the safety of the chemical and confirm that any migration is well below the allowable threshold.
MYTH Use of paper cups is leading to deforestation and killing the planet.	**FACT** Paper is typically made from trees, but the U.S. paper industry practices sustainable forestry and has a positive growth-drain ratio. This means that for every tree harvested, several more are planted or naturally regenerated in their place. For more information, click here or here.
MYTH Fluorochemicals used in foodservice packaging, like fast-food wrappers and molded fiber take-out containers, are dangerous.	**FACT** Fluorochemicals are used in some of today's foodservice packaging to provide a grease or oil barrier. Consumers can be assured that before any chemicals are used in food packaging, they are tested thoroughly and reviewed by the appropriate regulatory agency, such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and Health Canada.
MYTH Plastics are made from oil, a non-renewable resource from half-way around the world.	**FACT** The vast majority of plastics in the U.S. are made using natural gas found in North America. For more details, visit the U.S. Energy Information Administration's website.
MYTH Styrene, found in foam polystyrene cups and containers, causes cancer.	**FACT** Styrene is actually a naturally occurring element and is found in many human bodies. That's because you can find styrene in commonly consumed foods, like strawberries, peaches, cinnamon, beef and coffee. It's also a byproduct of processing beer, wine and cheese. Styrene used in the manufacture of foam foodservice packaging has been reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and other international regulatory agencies and has been found to be safe for its intended use. In addition, the levels of styrene found in foam cups and containers is more than 10,000 times below the safety limit set by the FDA. For more information, visit www.youknowstyrene.org.

email fpi@fpi.org | web www.fpi.org

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