



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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PRESS RELEASE

Date: June 14, 2018
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GREY BEARS MAKES FIRST RECYCLED POLYSTYRENE SHIPMENT

For a decade, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors have worked steadily to eradicate polystyrene (also known as Styrofoam) from the environment. Those efforts have taken a leap forward with Santa Cruz County's first shipment of recycled polystyrene.

In 2008, the Board prohibited the use of polystyrene food service containers, with several other jurisdictions later following suit. In 2012, the County banned the sale of all polystyrene products, become the first municipality in the U.S. to do so and making an instant improvement to coastal environments and other natural areas.

"Our regional environment is the foundation of our economy, our values and our identity. Polystyrene pollution threatens that and through our partnership with Grey Bears, we established the first and only polystyrene recycling operation in the County. This service is another reflection of our community's priorities in environmental protection," Santa Cruz County Board Chair Zach Friend said.

While technically recyclable, used polystyrene – known as Expanded Polystyrene Scrap – is too light and bulky to justify the cost of shipping to recyclers, and usually ends up in landfills. Using special machines, Grey Bears turns EPS into reusable manufacturing stock through a densification process, and just shipped its first load of 10 tons of densified polystyrene this week.

"EPS is made up of 98 percent air and 2 percent plastic," Grey Bears Executive Director Tim Brattan said. "The material we just shipped would have originally filled 45 40-yard containers. After processing, that same amount fit on 11 pallets. It'll be used in any of a range of downstream products, from picture frames, furniture and crown molding, to surfboards, insulation and synthetic lumber. Best of all it's out of local landfills and away from our bay."

Polystyrene is not allowed in recycling bins, but may be dropped off at Grey Bears during normal business hours. See www.greybears.org for hours and location.