

The Fight Against Styrofoam

BY HENRIK JONES

This month the environmental focus is on reducing solid waste. The Earthstep** this week is: **CUTTING BACK ON STYROFOAM**. According to *Earthworks*, "Americans produce enough styrofoam cups every year to circle the earth 436 times."

The problem with styrofoam is it lasts forever. Styrofoam, which is more formally called polystyrene foam, is non-biodegradable. The cup you buy at Kresge which ends up in the Allston municipal dump could be retrieved intact 500 years from now. Because polystyrene is basically benzene injected with air, this form of packaging takes up lots of space. Municipal landfills are already reaching capacity levels and polystyrene only exacerbates the space problem.

Another problem with polystyrene is that the production process is environmentally hazardous. The gases used in the production are often CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons) which eat ozone molecules hence depleting the Earth's ozone layer which gets back to the greenhouse effect. There are alternatives to CFC's but they are not much better for the environment. As you can see, from start to finish, polystyrene is a mess.

The Recycling Club and the Harvard Environmental Network recommend that we bring our own mugs and containers to stores. Thermo mugs are available at the Coffee Connection, but a second year member of the Recycling Club, Chris Couch, is also working on providing a lower cost alternative. In addition, the Harvard Environmental Network will be selling inexpensive, attractive mugs soon. Chris Couch said, "We have to learn to get rid of our wasteful habits. I'm as guilty as anyone, but we can't afford to continue to produce garbage as we have in the past. Over our lifetime, the overwhelming solid waste problem will force us to alter our lifestyles. Reusable mugs are a small step in the right direction. In fact, I would not be surprised if we saw a wide-spread resurgence of reusable products, like the returnable milk bottle."

Recognizing the environmental hazards of polystyrene, Kresge is offering a five cent discount to people who bring their own mugs. Cambridge merchants will also be giving discounts. Creative Gourmets and the Hark Box Cafe have already committed. Au Bon Pain and Store 24 are reviewing. My advice is simply to bring a mug and ask for the discount. After all, what's another "no" after all those other dings? (Oops—cheap shot.)

—Venture capitalists are taking notice of the rapidly growing environmental services business. Hambrecht & Quist has started a special fund devoted to environmental or related technology companies. Alex Brown & Sons has been recruiting for a research analyst specializing in environmental services.

—Packaged goods marketers take heed. Minneapolis and Saint Paul have adopted progressive recycling laws. The thrust of the laws: recycle plastic containers by mid-1991 or stop using them. The rationale is that there is a cost to the environment of making disposable packaging, and producers should bear some of that cost. In the past, Dannon could kiss its yogurt goodbye once it was in the supermarket. Minnesota laws now require Dannon to be responsible for the final destination of its plastic yogurt containers, be it municipal dump or recycling center. First products to be legally required are plastic containers for milk, water, carbonated beverages, and food from restaurants. These must be recycled starting January 1, 1991. This model could ripple through the rest of the country.

-Earthwatch is hosting a conference on global environmental concerns in Cambridge on Saturday, March 10th. Called EARTHWATCH 1990: MONITORING A CHANGING PLANET, it will be a forum for scientists to present their findings on a variety of issues ranging from global warming to why sharks may become extinct in thirty years. The conference will be held from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Harvard Science Center located at the corner of Kirkland and Oxford Streets. Admission for students is \$5. For more information, call Liz Gibbs at 926-8200.

**** Earthsteps** are recommendations from the Harvard Environmental Network for how the Harvard Community can reduce its impact on the environment by Earth Day on April 22. The Harvard Environmental Network includes environmental organizations from the following Harvard Schools: Business, College, Divinity, Design, Education, Kennedy, Law, Medical, and Public Health. Suggestions can be submitted to the Harvard Environmental Network by dropping them in the Earth Day box in front of Baker 20 or calling 3-8664.