

The future of EPS packaging in the European circular economy

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Expanded polystyrene (EPS) packaging contributes many economic, social and environmental benefits to a more sustainable, circular economy in Europe. It is a lightweight, highly **versatile** material, widely used to protect everything from sensitive goods to people. By **reliably** ensuring the safe packaging of valuable cargo from fresh fish to electronics and vaccines, EPS is essential to everyday and healthy living. Composed of 98% air, it is resource-**efficient, helps to reduce our carbon footprints**, and is **100% recyclable**. Furthermore, since before 2018, **recycling rates** for EPS post-consumer packaging waste exceeding **52%** in Belgium and Norway, **47%** in the Netherlands, **46%** in Germany, and **38%** in Italy, have been showing that **EPS recycling is economical**.

Rightly, **European policy continues to allow** customers as well as end-consumers to benefit from the unique qualities of **EPS packaging**, and the EPS value chain is active to keep it this way.

- Unfortunately, the [EU Single-use Plastics Directive](#) (SUPD) has addressed “expanded polystyrene” [under false pretenses](#) and in a [confusing](#) manner since 2019. However, it insofar exclusively restricts single-use beverage cups, as well as beverage and food containers. These are receptacles, such as fast food containers, which are used to contain food that is intended for immediate consumption, either on-the-spot or take-away, is typically consumed from the receptacle and without any further preparation, such as cooking, boiling or heating. The tendency of the plastic food container to become litter, due to its volume or size, in particular single-serve portions, also plays a decisive role. On this basis, the [European Commission has confirmed](#) (see table 4-2) that **the SUPD does not restrict e.g. fish boxes** or containers for frozen food that needs to be defrosted. The SUPD also **does not at all address e.g. the protective EPS packaging of electronics and appliances**. Whilst the Commission must review the SUPD by 2027, **no changes to this are currently foreseen**.
- **France** has adopted a [Climate Law](#) that broadly bans styrenic packaging – however, only from 2025 and [only if](#) it is not recyclable and unable to integrate in a recycling channel by then. Serious concerns aside whether this rule is compatible with EU law, it **will not affect EPS packaging that can be recycled**.
- The so-called ‘**EU plastic tax**’ is actually just [a way to determine a part of the contribution of each Member State to the EU budget](#) on the basis of unrecycled plastic packaging waste. The EU does [not](#) levy it upon economic operators. Furthermore, it does [not](#) specifically affect EPS. This also goes for the national plastic packaging taxes that the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain have developed – contrary to some [misleading reports](#) that mention EPS.
- The [EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive](#) (PPWD) sets **plastic packaging recycling targets** of **50%** (2025) and **55%** (2030). In 2022, the Commission will propose its revision, with a view to increasing reuse and the use of recycled plastic, as well as requiring *all* packaging to be economically recyclable by 2030.

With the [launch](#) of [Smart Packaging Europe](#) and the [appointment of Jürgen Lang as new Managing Director](#) of [EUMEPS](#), the association of European Manufacturers of Expanded Polystyrene that represents the industry as a whole, **the EPS sector has become more active** in raising awareness of benefits of EPS packaging. For example, it has been involved in the development of the revision of the PPWD, and – [as part of broad industry coalitions](#) – achieved that the Commission takes the more time for feedback from stakeholders and [called on the EU not to repeat the mistakes of the SUPD](#). After already having voluntarily [pledged in 2018](#) to meet the EU 2025 recycling target, EUMEPS will soon present the **progress towards achieving and exceeding the EU objectives**.

With all that, a regulatory environment for 2025-2030 has been developing, where **EPS packaging can continue to contribute to sustainability**.

About us

- **[EUMEPS](#)** is the association and voice of European Manufacturers of Expanded Polystyrene. Our members cover the entire EPS value chain from raw material suppliers to EPS converters and recyclers as well as supporting industries including machinery and additive suppliers. Members include individual companies as well as 22 European national EPS associations. This unique representation of the entire value chain ensures that EUMEPS represents both large companies and small- and medium-sized converters and recyclers. Altogether our membership represents more than 1,000 companies, most of them small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and employs more than 80,000 people.
- **[Smart Packaging Europe](#)** is an initiative of EUMEPS that brings together big and small companies, reflecting the diversity of the European EPS packaging industry.

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