April 15, 2013

Kavanagh (A.4973-A) / Krueger (S.3419-A)

Bill Title: An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to food service waste reduction

Purpose of Bill: The purpose of the bill is to discourage the use of disposable Styrofoam food service ware by any person or entity that has a contract with an agency or municipality, and to study of the feasibility of a Styrofoam ban in New York State

Statement of Support: Styrofoam is a commonly used material that is commercially manufactured from petroleum. In spite of the fact that it’s most common use is disposable containers, it cannot be easily recycled or reconstituted to make new products. Because it has little reuse value, Styrofoam products typically end up in landfills. Americans throw away 25,000,000 Styrofoam cups a year, which translates into 1,369 tons of Styrofoam products discarded every day. A single Styrofoam cup takes up to 500 years to fully disintegrate.

Styrofoam can have drastic negative effects on health and the environment. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has recognized that “such materials can have serious impacts on human health, wildlife, and the aquatic environment.” For example, when Styrofoam breaks down, it clogs waterways, is mistakenly consumed by wildlife, and leaches chemical byproducts into soil and water.

Styrofoam contains styrene, a hazardous substance that is suspected to be a carcinogen and neurotoxin. When food is re-heated in the microwave in a Styrofoam container, these toxins can be released from the container into the food and can then be consumed. Chronic exposure to Styrofoam can lead to depression, headache, fatigue, and have minor effects on kidney function. Styrofoam presents a potentially serious health hazard that should not be ignored.

This legislation addresses both the environmental and health impacts of Styrofoam by decreasing the amount of Styrofoam products in use by New York State agencies and thus decreasing the amount of Styrofoam products that end up in landfills. Demonstrated success at this scale may lead to a larger statewide policy regarding Styrofoam use. The bill allows for exceptions in cases where there is no alternative product to Styrofoam available that is of comparable cost.

Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Supports A.4973-A/S.3419-A.