

# Our Town

PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

## Diverting waste from landfills

### Squamish Styrofoam recycling initiative debuts

DAWN GREEN

Special to The Chief

It's considered the nemesis of every environmentalist and every landfill, for that matter — Styrofoam, the commonly misused term, or expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam, as it is technically called. Now an innovative program is ramping up in Squamish, allowing for the recycling of EPS, thus reducing its heavy influence on our landfill.

Prompted by customer feedback and a recent visit to his aunt's place in Vancouver, where he was perplexed to see her washing EPS meat trays, Sean Daly, Nesters Market store manager, was soon convinced this could be a viable option for Squamish.

Daly's aunt was taking her clean meat trays to a drop-off depot in Vancouver for recycling of EPS, provided by WCS Recycling. "From there I spoke to the people at WCS and asked them what we had to do to get it started," Daly said.

An EPS recycling program is now a reality and Squamish residents can drop off their EPS at the customer service desk at Nesters Market. Under an agreement with WCS Recycling, when the bin at Nesters Market is filled, the material is collected by WCS trucks which already service the Sea to Sky Corridor.

Accepting any sort of EPS product, including the foam used in packaging large items such as televisions, Daly emphasized that the meat trays must be cleaned first and must also have the recycling symbol on the bottom. Certain meat trays have a plastic liner or pad built into them and those can't be recycled, he said.

"I feel good about doing something that our customers asked us to do and I feel good at our customers are trying to look at



George Jasper, WCS Recycling operating manager (left), and Hugh Kerr, Squamish CAN waste group member, are pictured here with bales of compressed Styrofoam on a recent tour of the recycling facility in Vancouver.

ways to make small changes," Daly said. "At this point we're not going to turn away any Styrofoam and hopefully in the long run the local recyclers will pick up the slack if it becomes excessive."

Ray Christensen, sales manager of Carney's Waste Systems, said the company has been looking at recycling EPS for some time. "There are some avenues for us to recycle Styrofoam in a proper manner and we are working with Nesters on those initiatives," Christensen said.

With nearly 70 per cent of our garbage consisting of throw-away products and packaging, those types of recycling programs are making a difference, said Ana Santos, Squamish Climate Action Network (CAN) co-ordinator.

"Personally, I am very excited to finally have a way to divert Styrofoam from the landfill," she said. "This material is literally a nightmare — it never, ever breaks down, so if we throw it away, we're stuck with it fore-

er and we find it everywhere; on the sides of the roads, along the trails and in our waterways," said Santos, adding that she commends Daly for his initiative.

"Having said all that, we need to bear in mind this should only be taken as a temporary measure — what we need to do is move away from materials like Styrofoam altogether. There is no reason why in this day and age we couldn't come up with something better. It may not be as cheap, but that depends on what we call 'real cost' — Styrofoam comes with a huge price tag attached to its environmental impact," Santos said.

Hugh Kerr of Squamish CAN's waste group said EPS is a frustrating waste issue in the community.

"It does not break down, and the foam occupies a lot of volume for its weight. Hence one of the main concerns is simply that it helps to fill up expensive landfills, and will remain buried for a very long time," said Kerr.

Kerr said Gibsons Resource Re-

covery Centre on the Sunshine Coast could serve as a model for Squamish. Not only do officials there collect EPS, the centre also uses an EPS densifying machine that uses high-volume extrusion technology to heat up the material, place it in a mould and create dense foam.

"With a reduction rate of 90-1, one tonne of recycled Styrofoam easily fits on one pallet," said owner Buddy Boyd.

The dense foam is then sold to an American contractor and is re-used to make high-end crown moulding, photo frames, flower pots and bike helmet insulation, among other things.

"It's a way of mining the waste stream, extracting what was once considered garbage as a resource," Boyd said.

Squamish residents are encouraged to drop off their EPS for recycling at the Nesters Market customer service desk and send any inquiries to [squamish-can@gmail.com](mailto:squamish-can@gmail.com).

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