



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Kavanagh and Krueger: McDonald's Teacup Not So "Sweet" for Our Environment

LIZ KRUEGER July 15, 2008

Legislators Call on Restaurants to Stop Using Styrofoam
As McDonald's Backslides on Its Commitment to the Environment
By Reintroducing Polystyrene Cup for Its "Sweet Tea"

NEW YORK CITY—Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh, Senator Liz Krueger, Senator Eric Schneiderman and the League of Conservation Voters, joined by other elected officials, called upon McDonald's and other restaurants and food service providers to stop using polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam. McDonald's recently reintroduced Styrofoam cups to serve "Sweet Tea"—almost two decades after acceding to public pressure and removing Styrofoam from their restaurants.

"Polystyrene cups are used in a matter of minutes but remain in our waterways and landfills for centuries," said Assemblymember Kavanagh, who was recently named a 2008 Environmental Star by the New York League of Conservation Voters. "With a wide array of environmentally friendly options available, there is no excuse for the food industry to use Styrofoam products. These new cups will now take their place in landfills next to all the clamshell containers McDonald's stopped selling 18 years ago."

Polystyrene, a petroleum-based product, poses a widespread hazard to the environment and human health. Styrofoam takes hundreds of years to fully disintegrate, pollutes waterways, and is often mistaken for food by wildlife. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, polystyrene poses health risks as it is classified as a suspected human carcinogen and neurotoxin. Every day Americans throw away approximately 1,369 tons of Styrofoam products.

Senator Krueger said, “The new Styrofoam cup for McDonald's "Sweet Tea" only represents the tip of the iceberg – they are only one of many offenders including many of their competitors. The NYC school system alone throws away 150 million Styrofoam meal trays annually. We need to put an end to the use of Styrofoam in this state. New York has the ability to produce affordable and biodegradable alternatives to Styrofoam and the time to start using them is now.”

Assemblymember Kavanagh and Senator Krueger have been pushing two bills in the State legislature (A9420/S6402 and A11466/S8729) that would require private sector restaurants and food service providers, as well as state and local government agencies and their contractors, to replace Styrofoam with recyclable or compostable alternatives. The Assembly passed one of these bills last month, but the Senate majority has not taken up either bill.

“Despite the overwhelming evidence showing the negative impact of Styrofoam on our environment, the executives at McDonald's have moved their company in the wrong direction by reintroducing polystyrene cups for their latest summer beverage,” said Senator Schneiderman. “There are viable alternatives to Styrofoam, and I am confident that the legislation sponsored by Assemblymember Kavanagh and Senator Krueger will go a long way to reducing waste in our landfills.”

“Styrofoam cups were long ago recognized as a significant environmental hazard. These products will clog our landfills and pollute our environment for literally thousands of years,” said Josh Nachowitz, Policy Director for the New York League of Conservation Voters.

“McDonald’s recent decision to return this dangerous material to the marketplace is a stark example of poor corporate responsibility and sends a message that environmental irresponsibility is acceptable. We’re here today to say loud and clear that we expect the corporate community to be responsible stewards of our environment”