

## What happened to Dunkin' Donuts' vow to get rid of Styrofoam cups?

By [Karen Graham](#) | Sep 26, 2016

In 2010, Dunkin' Donuts said it was looking for a replacement for its iconic Styrofoam coffee cups because they were environmentally unfriendly. After six years, the company is still using them. What gives?



Dunkin' Donuts shop in Chicago  
Photo by: Shahrukh Hasan

In a 2010 report, Dunkin' Donuts addressed the issue of Styrofoam and its negative impact on the environment, saying they considered the foam material to be "the most prominent sustainability issue we must deal with."

In a report issued two years later, the company said they were still looking into finding an alternative for the Styrofoam cups, but it might take another two or three years before they could find a replacement. In the meantime, other fast food chains have been adopting more eco-friendly alternatives, but Dunkin' Donuts has done nothing.

### Styrofoam has its problems

Styrofoam is the trade name for a [polystyrene foam product](#) that is well-known for its insulation qualities. In other words, they keep your coffee hot. Not only is Styrofoam the fifth largest creator of hazardous waste, but it poses a health hazard to humans and animals.

Styrofoam products make up 25 to 30 percent of our landfills and it is not going anywhere. As for recycling, the market for recycling is very small and appears to not be profitable. This is because polystyrene recycling is not "closed loop," meaning that collected polystyrene cups are not remanufactured into cups, but into other products such as cafeteria trays.

Strangely enough, in places where polystyrene is banned, such as in Taiwan, Portland, OR and Orange County, CA, as well as other places, Dunkin' Donuts uses an alternative coffee cup made with a more recyclable plastic known as [polypropylene](#). The cup can be identified by the Number 5 that appears on the bottom of the cup.

### Why has Dunkin' Donuts not made the big change?

"We are not prepared to transition fully out of foam at this time," Christine Riley Miller, Dunkin' Brands' senior director of corporate social responsibility, told [Business Insider](#) in a statement.

According to Miller, one problem is the cost. The polypropylene lid and cup combo cost a lot more than the Styrofoam cup and lid. Miller also said that many customers "are not satisfied with the lid on the new cup," according to [Yahoo Finance](#).

But many of the Dunkin' Donuts facilities are franchises, and getting individual owners to join in on a major change is difficult. According to Miller, this is the reason they are still searching for alternatives.

"They're being reactive," said Conrad MacKerron, senior vice president of As You Sow.

They have been trying for years to get Dunkin' Donuts to get rid of their foam cups. "They're in a comfortable spot because they've made the commitment, and now they say they're just trying to get the logistics right."

Yeah, right. MacKerron cites McDonald's, which also franchises a majority of its restaurants, but was able to make the switch from foam to paper cups. So what is Dunkin' Donuts waiting for?