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## When were Styrofoam Cups Invented?

By Anton Busch, eHow Contributor



*The earliest precursor to what we call the styrofoam cup was invented in Germany in the 19th century. Today, however, when we enjoy a hot drink that stays hot or a cold drink that stays cold, holding it in a hand that stays dry and at normal body temperature, we are actually using a different type of foamed plastic called polystyrene. Read on to learn more about the history of the "styrofoam cup."*

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### Styrol

According to the 2000 publication "Polystyrene: synthesis, production and applications" by J.R. Wunsch, the first ancestor of Styrofoam was discovered by a chemist named Eduard Simon in 1839, in Germany. Simon distilled storax, derived from a tree, which created a "resinous solid" that he named styrol.

### Polystyrene

Nearly a century later, again according to Wunsch, Herman Staudinger identified the makeup of styrol as being a "chain-like molecule" and renamed it polystyrol. Polystyrol later became known as polystyrene and was first produced on an industrial scale in 1931 by IG Farbenindustrie in Germany.

### Styrofoam

On Dec. 16, 1946, Dow Chemical trademarked the term Styrofoam, according to U.S. Patent and Trademark Office records. Today, we refer to all polystyrene-type material as styrofoam; however, this term should be used only to refer to the material produced by Dow. Particularly, Styrofoam is a building insulation material produced by Dow that is distinct from the material that polystyrene cups are made of. In fact, there is no

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such thing as a "Styrofoam coffee cup," according to Dow.

## Foam Polystyrene

On July 26, 1947, Otis Ray McIntire, an inventor with Dow, invented foamed polystyrene. This new material was 30 times lighter than normal polystyrene and was far more durable and flexible. This material was highly water-resistant as well.

## Warren R. Price and Alexander S. Houston

On May 9, 1957, Warren R. Price and Alexander S. Houston, assignors to Waxed Paper Company, filed a patent for a method of making a receptacle of foamed polystyrene. Referencing McIntire's manufacturing of foamed polystyrene, Price and Houston claimed that their method would make receptacles that would be "competitive with paper cups" and could be comfortably held in one's hand "even though boiling water is poured into the cup." This marks the earliest mention of a polystyrene cup.

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## References

[McIntire's Patent of Foam Polystyrene](#)

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