

TRULEGAL

HOW AN NMSU STUDENT TURNED A PROJECT INTO A RESOLUTION

By: Joseph Fullbright

There are many common factors of Earth's environmental issue of air pollution: the big factories that are constantly releasing smoke into the atmosphere and the big vehicles that can release exhaust. But, would you ever guess that something as little as Styrofoam has such an impact on our planet?

Styrofoam has become one of the most convenient recent innovations. It is extremely lightweight- 95% air, fairly cheap, keeps your food insulated, and even keeps valuable items safe and protected during the shipping process. The common thought is that the worst thing about Styrofoam has to be when it is broken up. The little beads go everywhere and can be difficult to pick up. Big deal. The pros outweigh that one, little con.

It turns out there isn't just that one, little con. Styrofoam is made from polystyrene, a petroleum-based plastic. With that, brings many environmental health concerns. A 2014 'National Toxicological Program' report classifies polystyrene as a possible human carcinogen, meaning it can be linked to occurrences of leukemia and lymphoma cancer.

Another concern comes in the form of food contamination. Many times, Styrofoam is used to heat up leftovers for their meals. Food in those Styrofoam containers can very well be contaminated by chemicals that are released. That can affect human health and the reproductive systems.

Styrofoam is also not biodegradable, meaning it holds its form while in landfills and can take up to millions of years to decompose.

NMSU student Okhumode "Hector" Yakubu, who is an environmental enthusiast, was tired of seeing the bad that Styrofoam was causing and turned a school project for his master's degree into a senate approved bill from ASNMSU.

"I have a passion for the environment," said Yakubu. "What brought me to NMSU was (the) environmental issues."

Yakubu said that the project started back in June following an internship he completed with David Shearer at the NMSU Department of Environmental Health and Safety.

He referenced a report published by Kansas State University which stated that NMSU was 3rd out of 233 institutions of higher education in the 2015 RecycleMania rankings- acknowledging their advancements in eco-friendliness.

The goal of the project was to push for the replacement of Styrofoam used in the food services across campus with more healthy and eco-friendly substitutes.

"Styrofoam has been declared a possible human carcinogen by the EPA and the International Agency for Cancer Research," he added. "Additionally, research suggests that it is neither recyclable nor reusable, and so, poses (as) an economical nuisance."

Yakubu decided to reach out to ASNMSU president Matt Bose in

an attempt to set up a meeting to see what they could do about the issue. The two, along with many others of the Senate, came to a resolution to have Styrofoam eliminated from the campus' food services.

There are many positives to the elimination from NMSU. As mentioned earlier, it is not biodegradable, unlike paper. Plates and other items made from paper are much more efficient for the environment when they are disposed of. Eventually, paper breaks down and goes away; Styrofoam does not. Also, the students of NMSU will not be exposed to the polystyrene from it, which is a win for everybody considering it confirmed as something that has the potential to cause cancer.

What started off as a simple thought, has now evolved into an impact that will likely last long after Yakubu finishes his degree. It showed that just because a person is not in the student government, does not mean they cannot make a difference. That's exactly what Okhumode Yakubu did. He is just an ordinary student like most of us. He turned a school project for his master's degree into a Senate-approved bill from ASNMSU to have Styrofoam eliminated from the school's food services.

Do not be afraid to let your voice be heard, because you can make a difference.

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