Styrofoam Out of Schools (SOS)/ Fund for the City of New York
www.SOSnyc.org

Debby Lee Cohen, Co-founder and Director
Jean Lee, Advisor

Contact:
E-mail: debbylee23@verizon.net

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Oversight: The Department of Education's School Food Policies and Procedures

1. Introduction:

NYC's 1 billion dollar annual waste exportation bill is on the rise. By the year 2030, the Mayor's target year for 30% carbon emission reduction, our children will be adults possibly with children of their own. Their lifelong habits regarding food, food waste and recycling are shaped by what we teach them now.

Lunch period, arguably one of the most disregarded periods of the entire school day, is an ideal cultural opportunity to raise "reduce" awareness and recycling rates, cultivating healthier food **and** food **waste** rituals.

With a growing national school food reform movement, it is the ideal time to heighten awareness of the massive amount of garbage we create with our food habits, including the approximately 16,500 tons of waste per year created by NYC's Styrofoam (polystyrene) lunch trays (cited in Speaker Quinn's recent FOODWORKS report, Post Consumption section, http://council.nyc.gov/html/action_center/food.shtml).

2. NYC Department of Education (DoE) schools throw out over 850,000 Styrofoam (polystyrene) trays per day, except for "TRAYLESS TUESDAYS", as of March 2010 (see DoE Press Release, http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/NewsandSpeeches/2009-2010/trayless031610.htm)

Over the past 20 years, our schools have thrown out approximately **3 billion polystyrene lunch trays**, each used for about 20 minutes. TRAYLESS TUESDAYS reduces polystyrene tray use by 20%, diverting at least 2.4 million trays from landfills per month. Additionally, some schools have taken initiatives to use alternatives to polystyrene trays on Pizza Fridays and for Breakfast as well. With the volume of meals served in NYC's public schools, we have the potential to make a tremendous environmental and educational impact.

Our children eat school food directly off of polystyrene trays, a petroleum-based product composed of the chemicals benzene and styrene. Polystyrene is not biodegradable, crowds our landfills and is a major source of ocean pollution. Styrene, a suspected carcinogen, may potentially migrate from the polystyrene trays into hot school food. Many of our children routinely scrape their trays and may be eating styrene directly off their sporks.

The remarkable success of TRAYLESS TUESDAYS was achieved in less than one year by partnering with invaluable allies – our directors of (DoE) SchoolFood – setting in motion this urgently needed change. Much more action is required to **fully eliminate** Styrofoam from NYC public schools and to work towards zero-waste, healthier cafeterias in order to benefit our children, our communities in New York City, and ultimately, the nation.

3. We are asking the support of City Council Members and the Mayor's office to:

1. Eliminate the use of polystyrene in all NYC DoE schools.
2. Provide financial support for the piloting of alternative food service ware products and closed system solutions.
3. Call for inter-agency support of such pilots.
4. Call for an official REDUCE POLICY and philosophy throughout all school cafeterias and government buildings.
5. Consider the Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) of food service ware in NYC DoE sourcing and contracting; acknowledge the "true cost" of products by accounting for the environmental impact of manufacturing, transport, and disposal.

4. Conclusion:

The success of TRAYLESS TUESDAYS could not have been realized without the collaborative leadership demonstrated by NYC DoE, but our work is far from complete. We have only begun to take the first steps towards establishing a sustainable system in the largest public school system in the country.

Due to sheer scale and purchasing power, NYC Department of Education (DoE) has the potential to set unprecedented national trends for manufacturing, and school cafeteria waste reduction policies; thus, lowering the costs for alternative sustainable solutions.

We have shown that by working together, we can bring the School Food post-consumption issue to the lunchroom table!

Styrofoam Out of Schools (SOS) Mission:

SOS is working to achieve "zero waste" cafeterias in NYC's public schools by first eliminating Styrofoam (polystyrene) trays, and by advocating a reduce policy on single use and non-recyclable food service disposables and packaging.

We are parents, designers, educators, and policy advocates, accomplishing our work through multi-stakeholder collaboration, innovative design, in-cafeteria education, and community-based advocacy.