Press release, 4 July 2022

DUTCH RIVERS AND BANKS LITTERED WITH POLYSTYRENE FOAM

An alarmingly large amount of polystyrene foam was found along the Dutch river banks this spring. Pieces of polystyrene foam were found on 70 percent of the banks during the last monitoring by Clean Rivers (Schone Rivieren), an average of 80 pieces per 100 metres. Clean Rivers is very concerned about the polystyrene foam pollution and urgently calls on the government to develop stronger laws and regulations. In the meantime, they are urging the industry to self-regulate.

During the spring Clean Rivers measurements, volunteers found a total of 127,000 pieces of waste on 418 banks, an average of 304 pieces per 100 metres. The three most found items were polystyrene foam and unidentifiable pieces of soft and hard plastic smaller than 50 cm. Since the beginning of the monitoring by Clean Rivers, polystyrene foam has been in the top 15 most frequently found items. For two years now, the material has consistently been in the top 3. *'Polystyrene foam is easily carried by wind and it floats, so it spreads easily. It ends up in the rivers and that is why we find it so much along the banks. The material breaks down very easily into small pieces or balls. That also makes it difficult to clean up',* explains Clean Rivers project leader Joost Barendrecht.

THE MATERIAL REMAINS IN THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CENTURIES

Polystyrene foam has many applications. Originally, it is an isolation material, but because it is light and can be shaped in any form it is also often used as packaging material. In construction, it is used as a foundation and in floors. It is also widely used in horticulture. Polystyrene is a synthetic material and does not break down, so it remains present for centuries and we find it more and more in the environment. It causes a lot of direct animal suffering. Small pieces and balls are left behind on the water and banks and are mistaken by birds, for example, for food. Their stomachs increasingly fill up with these materials and they may eventually starve to death.

Despite this, there are hardly any laws or regulations to prevent pollution with polystyrene foam. That is why Clean Rivers is sounding the alarm and asking the government to speed up this process. In the meantime, however, it is important that the industry recognises the major polystyrene foam issue and starts working on the urgently needed solutions. Barendrecht: *'There are already good examples of companies taking measures to prevent polystyrene foam from polluting their premises or building sites. They are already taking responsibility, but as long as there is no clear regulation by the*

government, this will never happen on a large scale. We also see that alternatives are being developed in the packaging industry. So it is possible to do things differently.'

HACKATHON

Clean Rivers wants to stimulate solutions for the polystyrene foam problem and therefore organises a Hackathon event in October. Anyone who can contribute innovative solutions to tackle this growing problem is invited to come forward. Whether it is the introduction of alternative materials, clearer regulations or ways to prevent leakage into the environment, all ideas are welcome at info@schonerivieren.nl.

CLEAN RIVERS

The plastics soup is a worldwide threat to the environment and the health of people and animals. The problem starts closer to home than you might think. Through our rivers, this litter ends up in our seas and oceans, where it adds to the plastic soup.

The issues surrounding the pollution of the Dutch rivers has brought together three non-profit organizations (IVN Natuureducatie, Plastic Soup Foundation & Stichting De Noordzee) that have collectively founded Clean Rivers. The project is based on four pillars: cleaning up, research, education and exploration, and problem solving. The goal? Plastic-free rivers by 2030.