

## Environmental Building News Decries Polystyrene Insulation



Alex Wilson

In the article "Polystyrene Insulation: Does It Belong in a Green Building?" [Environmental Building News](#) executive editor Alex Wilson says there's enough health and environmental evidence to suggest that the answer is "No."

"All insulation materials are green on one level because they play a huge role in reducing building energy consumption," Wilson says, but adds that polystyrene insulation may not be the best choice.

Wilson, a long-time green building advocate and a nominee for the [2009 Hanley Award for Vision and Leadership in Sustainable Housing](#), describes various issues with polystyrene insulation and recommends alternatives be used when doing so will not compromise a building's energy performance.

The editor of the well-regarded EBN monthly newsletter says that polystyrene is produced from toxic chemicals—benzene, which is a known human carcinogen, and styrene, which is considered an endocrine disruptor, asthma inducer, and possible carcinogen. In addition, all polystyrene building insulation—extruded (XPS) and expanded (EPS)—contains the brominated flame retardant HBCD, which European agencies have labeled an organic pollutant and a bioaccumulative toxin. The EBN article says that despite significant effort, manufacturers have been unable to find a flame-retardant substitute.

"Polystyrene is the least green of common insulation materials," Wilson writes in the article, which outlines alternative materials. He recommends rigid mineral wool, which he says performs well on exterior foundation walls and is being used beneath concrete slabs in Europe.

"Polystyrene Insulation: Does it Belong in a Green Building?" was published in the August 2009 issue of *Environmental Building News*. You must be an EBN subscriber to read the entire story at [www.buildinggreen.com](http://www.buildinggreen.com).

—Jean Dimeo



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