More than 113 million pounds of EPS were recycled in 2018. This figure includes 39.7 million pounds of post-use material and 74.1 million pounds of post-industrial recovery. Post-use is defined as any material that is recycled after its intended end-use while post-industrial recovery includes EPS facility scrap that is recycled but never served its intended purpose as a packaging material or other end-use application.

Newer EPS recycling technologies to facilitate EPS collection and reprocessing launched in 2018 indicate growth rates will continue on an upward trend in the future. Since 1991 EPS recycling has demonstrated consistent overall growth. Like all industries, recycling is driven by market shifts and commodity price fluctuations and, in 2017, China’s import restrictions had a severe impact on all recyclables. Despite this, EPS recycling in the U.S. has proven sustainable.
The 2018 Expanded Polystyrene Recycling Rate Study was conducted by the EPS Industry Alliance to gather data to reflect both post-use and post-industrial recycling activity. The 2018 results are based on data received from 54 EPS manufacturers and independent recyclers in the U.S. Participation in the EPS recycling survey is voluntary and the reported data is based on the responses received. Many companies have limited resources to put towards participation in the survey, and some companies may choose not to respond due to their confidentiality policies. Therefore, because there is not 100 percent participation, the presented totals represent the minimum amount of EPS recovered for recycling.

Not everything can be recycled all the time. In order for materials to be recycled, stable markets must exist and there must be a demand for the end products. Each community has its own guidelines for which plastics are accepted, and these can vary widely. Some locations also offer consumer drop-off access. To find out if EPS recycling is available in your area, visit www.epsindustry.org. For consumers that do not have access to a local drop-off center, the EPS-IA sponsors a National Mail-Back Program intended for smaller quantities of EPS which can be mailed via USPS or UPS to more than 30 locations nationwide. Full instructions and a list of Mail-Back locations are available on the EPS-IA website.