

# Winner of SOBA green award continues R&D efforts

Maker of degradable polystyrene food container aims to share eco-friendly technology with other manufacturers

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PLASTIC packaging company Logomas Packaging Sdn Bhd has been in operation since 1995 and aims to be at the forefront of innovations in plastic packaging.

So it was no surprise when it won the Star Outstanding Business Awards 2017 (SOBA) Gold Award in the Best Green Initiative category for its biggest and latest milestone – EcoBox.

The Logomas EcoBox is a degradable polystyrene foam disposable food box, and is lauded to be the first in Malaysia too, said Logomas Packaging managing director Angela Foo.

Since 2008, the team has been researching and developing the right formula to create this eco-friendly box that would give users peace of mind.

“We began this research way back then when we knew the future was heading towards environmentally-friendly products.

“We knew we had to change to be relevant and sustainable in the business,” she said.

The company begun mass producing the EcoBox in 2014.

Compared to the conventional type of polystyrene foam box which is not degradable, EcoBox is photodegradable whereby it gradually breaks down with exposure to light.

Foo explained that it takes two to three years before the polystyrene is broken down by sunlight; the disintegrated pieces will eventually be consumed by microbes in the soil as food, releasing water, carbon dioxide and biomass.

“But this isn’t the end of our research and development because we are constantly improving.

“We are currently working on a biodegradable version of the polystyrene lunch box but it is not ready yet, as it is going to take a bit of time.

“Biodegradation is nature’s waste management and recycling system. For biodegradable products, it will be broken down by microbial organisms in a composting environment.

“This is possible because plastics are essentially carbon-based,” she said.

The team’s effort for the past decade certainly paid off with the SOBA 2017 Award, but also their passion for creating a product that is safe to use.

The degradable polystyrene foam food package has been certified by some of the trusted and well-known eco-labels from Malaysia, Singapore and Australia.

Among the certifications it received were Sirim Eco-Label by Sirim, Malaysia’s official green labelling scheme MyHIJAU, Singapore Green Label and Global GreenTag from Australia.

## Stumbling blocks

However, one of the biggest obstacles for the company was to change consumers’ perception on eco-friendly products.

“Eco products are usually more expensive, therefore it is not always readily accepted by the market.

“We worked very hard to ensure that our eco-friendly products do not burden our customers.

“In fact, our products cost the same as conventional white-coloured polystyrene foam packaging,” Foo pointed out.

Even though EcoBox is the solution to the local authorities’ recent move to encourage the use of eco-friendly packaging, it is not an easy road for Logomas.

The team struggles to communicate the advantages of polystyrene to various authorities and face a number of other roadblocks



Foo (fourth from left) and her team celebrating the company’s victory at the SOBA 2017 Awards. — Photos courtesy of Logomas.



The EcoBox range by Logomas.

along the way.

Polystyrene products, especially the iconic clam-shell takeaway boxes that we use to *tapau* (pack) our food, has been a topic of debate for the past couple of years.

Logomas, on the other hand, has spent much time fighting the cause in reassuring the public that polystyrene containers do not pose human health issues and is not the real culprit of litter.

“Polystyrene is misunderstood. Because it is light and it floats, it is the first thing you see in the river, floating while the rest of the rubbish are all below since they’re heavier.

“But it is not as simple as just banning them with the aim of solving pollution. If you replace it with paper or any other material, you will still see them in drains and rivers because litterbugs continue to treat our environment as their rubbish bins.

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“It is not so much the product that is at fault but the people’s mindset and attitude. “Why do you have to toss things out of your car window when you can get to a proper rubbish bin to dispose the rubbish?” Foo pointed out.

She emphasised that the change of mindset should also start with education where the children will learn from school.

Foo also hoped to drive home the message that polystyrene foam products are actually 100% recyclable instead of heading to the landfills, contrary to popular belief.

“I don’t think most of us are aware that polystyrene can be recycled.

“We’ve been trying to get this message across but there are limitations like having a small advertising and promotion budget,” she said.

## Walking the talk

To walk the talk, Logomas is currently working with SWM Environment Sdn Bhd (SWM) on its pilot project in Bukit Palong, Negri Sembilan to collect polystyrene products from household waste.

SWM is an integrated waste management and public cleansing service provider in the southern region of Peninsular Malaysia, offering services including waste collection and transfer.

“Households will separate the recyclables, including polystyrene, before it is collected by SWM and brought back to their collection centre.

“We then collect the foam from them and bring it back to a third-party recycler in



The SWM drop-off centre in Bukit Palong, Negri Sembilan. This is where polystyrene products from household waste are collected and separated before they are sent for recycling.



Logomas employees work hard to improve polystyrene packaging to ensure there are more eco-friendly products in the market.



Foo (centre) and her team showing the EcoBox. — SAM THAM/The Star



An SWM employee distributing flyers to inform residents on the recycling of polystyrene waste.

Klang, who is a long-time business associate of ours that does recycling of post-consumer polystyrene.”

The polystyrene will then be recycled into engineered wood and turned into products such as outdoor park benches, plastic rulers, building materials, synthetic wood furniture, picture frames and surf boards.

These products are sometimes donated to various non-profit organisations; however, to do so, there needs to be enough polystyrene collected before a whole product is made.

The pilot project by Logomas has been going on for six months, and to-date, collected about 600kg of polystyrene.

“But in the manufacturing context, 600kg is very little to start a production line.

“Right now we are accumulating as much as we can to reach a certain quantity – about 20 tonnes, before we can go into production,” Foo explained.

As it is post-consumer polystyrene, she assured us that the foam is not being recycled into food packaging products due to hygiene purposes.

On top of that, polystyrene foam actually has one of the lowest carbon footprint as compared to other plastic products, based on the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA).

LCA is the analysis of a product's life cycle, from cradle to grave, and its impact on the environment – how much energy is used to produce, transport and eventually dispose it.

“Polystyrene is an energy-efficient product. It uses the least energy to be produced because it comprises more than 90% air, and very little of it is actually plastic.

“As it is lightweight, it doesn't require

**“We are the first to come up with this eco-friendly polystyrene lunch box and we are also working with other manufacturers to change to this as well.”**

Angela Foo

much fuel for the trucks to transport it.”

Since polystyrene can be recycled, its life cycle is no longer from cradle to grave but from cradle to cradle where it is repurposed for something else to minimise the disposable part.

Polystyrene can be part of the circular economy and Logomas is committed on ensuring that, Foo stressed.

“Paper has a much higher LCA rate. You have to see where paper comes from; you need to cut down trees to get paper, and also take into consideration the carbon footprint of the production process of paper because carbon emission is one of the factors that contribute to climate change.

“Did you know that most of the paper products used to wrap food, like the brown paper used to wrap nasi lemak and some paper boxes to take away food, are not recyclable?

“That's because it has a thin layer of plastic (polyethylene film) laminated on it to prevent the oil or gravy from seeping through.

“There are only one, if not two, recyclers in the world that can separate the plastic from the paper and then recycle the latter, but they are not in Asia.

“As a result, the papers head to the landfill,” she added.

Another effort that Foo is taking is getting in touch with the Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change Ministry.

They are currently in the process of setting up an audience with the ministry to explain what the degradable EcoBox is all about.

### Putting differences aside

To-date, Logomas is one of eight manufacturers that manufactures polystyrene foam in Malaysia, with a 20% market share.

The team at Logomas will continue to work hard in creating awareness and educating the public and authorities that polystyrene is now degradable with the EcoBox.

“We are the first to come up with this eco-friendly polystyrene lunch box and we are also working with other manufacturers to change to this as well.

“Even though we are all competitors, it is healthy competition. We want to share the technology with them.

“They are slowly moving on to the testing stages now and perhaps in a year or two, all of the polystyrene boxes will be eco-friendly ones,” Foo concluded.

Logomas focuses not only on food packaging whose office and manufacturing plant are in Shah Alam, but also industrial type packaging for the electronics industry (based in China).

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Logomas Packaging Sdn Bhd managing director Angela Foo with the company's EcoBox, which are food boxes made from degradable polystyrene foam. — SAM THAM/The Star

## Box of success

Logomas Packaging Sdn Bhd's degradable polystyrene foam food packs, called EcoBox, won the company the Star Outstanding Business Awards 2017 (SOBA) Gold Award in the Best Green Initiative category. The company is now working on improving on a biodegradable version. > 22&23