



Polystyrene Foam in Lake Champlain: Insights from 2026 Property Owners' Survey

Polystyrene foam is lightweight, does not biodegrade, crumbles easily into small pieces that are difficult to clean up, and can negatively impact wildlife and enter waterways. As such, the **Lake Champlain Basin Marine Debris Coalition** (Coalition) educates lakeshore businesses, property owners, and recreational users about the impacts of foam marine debris with a goal to limit its presence in the lake as litter.

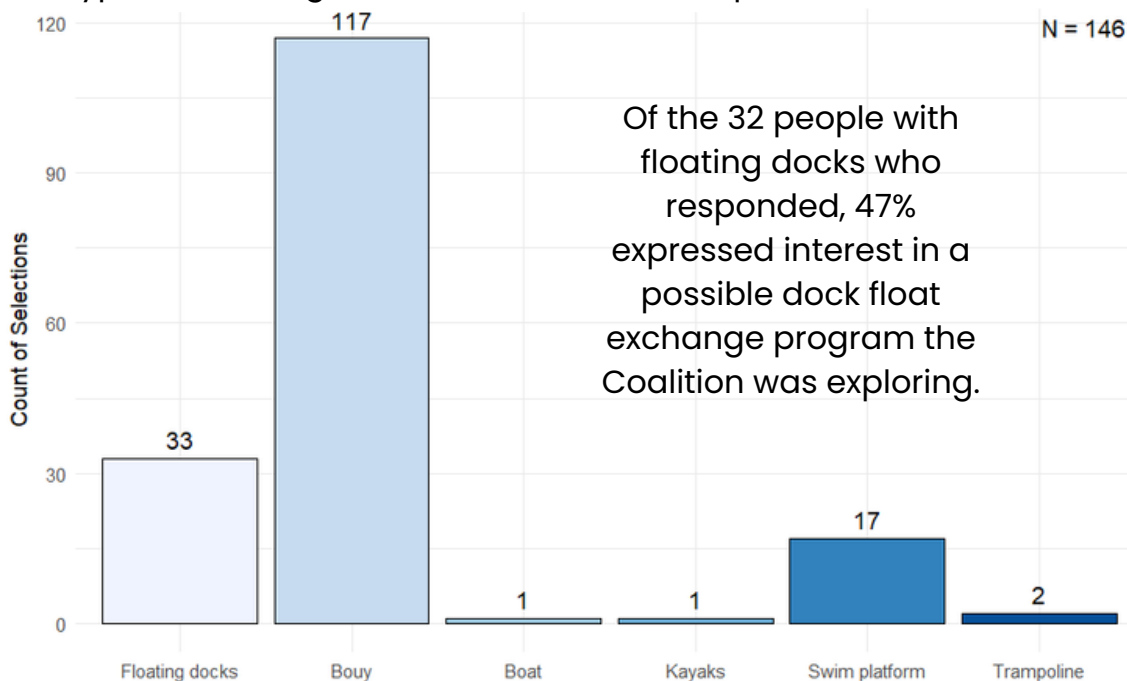
January through March of 2026, the Coalition surveyed Lake Champlain property owners to understand their use of polystyrene foam and gauge their interest in and opportunity to switch to non-foam alternatives. Through mailed postcards, 3200 waterfront properties were surveyed, and 344 responded. This document summarizes key results and takeaways for Coalition members.

RESPONDENTS

- 52% were seasonal residents, while 47% resided at their property year-round.
- On average, seasonal homeowners used their property for 98 days, while someone else (e.g., family members, renters) used the property for 47 days.
- 56% of the respondents had floating structures at their property.

RESULTS

Types of floating structures on Lake Champlain



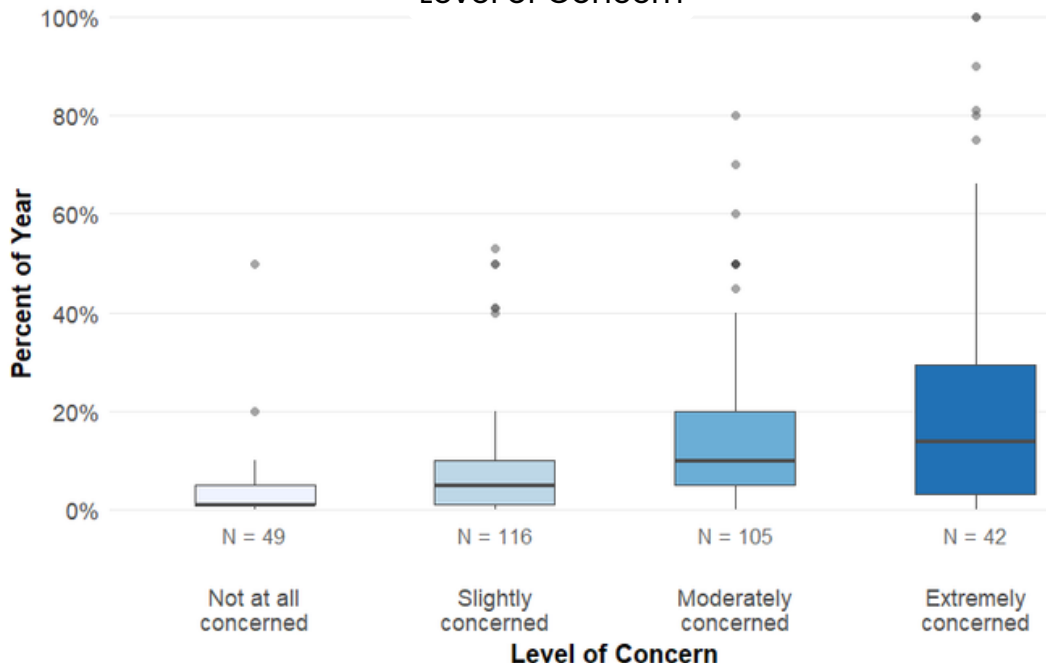
Motivation to use foam alternatives N=116

Motivation	Percent of respondents
Info on Alternatives	41.4%
info on Impacts	18.1%
lower cost	17.2%
this survey	12.9%
rebate program	6.9%
Nothing	5.2%

- 53% of respondents inspected the condition of their dock floats annually.
- Conversely, 69% of the respondents with buoys inspected them annually.
- More than half of the respondents had never had to replace their dock floats.
- 7% of respondents with floating docks had unencapsulated foam dock floats.
- 12% of respondents with buoys had unencapsulated foam buoys.

RESULTS CONTINUED

Percent of Year Foam Debris Was Seen on Lake Champlain, by Level of Concern



This Box and Whisker plot is interpreted as follows: The middle 50% of the data are represented by the box, while the line in the center of the box represents the median. The lines stretching out from the box represent the max and min data within the acceptable deviation. Dots represent outliers in the data.

FURTHER ACTION



- Lakeshore property owners lacked knowledge of the impacts of foam pollution on wildlife, recreation, and water quality.
- Lakeshore property owners lacked knowledge of alternatives to foam-based floating structures used in the lake.
- The survey also revealed other foam-based floats commonly used on the lake. These included pool noodles (56 property owners self-reported using these) and dock bumpers or fenders (27 property owners self-reported using these).

TAKE-AWAYS

- Those who are concerned about foam pollution are also seeing it in the lake.
- Education is needed regarding alternatives to foam products and the impacts of foam pollution on the environment.
- Very few people have unencapsulated foam dock floats.
- Unencapsulated foam buoys are more common.
- Many people have items other than docks, like pool noodles and swim platforms, which may contain unencapsulated foam.

SUPPORT AND THANKS

We would like to express our gratitude to survey participants and those who support this effort!

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