



Starbucks Disposable Cups Deemed "Unrecyclable" by Major Recycling Companies

Posted On: July 02



Although Starbucks has been praised for their many green endeavors, there also has been criticism of the company, claiming that the paper cups (that promote recycling on their label) can't actually be recycled.

Supposedly, the plastic film on the inside of the cups, which prevents the coffee from leaking, stops recyclers from accepting the cups in many cities nationwide.

In reality, anything can be recycled, but "the system is not designed to take the individual Starbucks cups," says Steve Sargent, director of Rumpke Recycling of Columbus. Waste Management, North America's largest recycler, also won't take the cups.

"The biggest roadblock to recycling is the lack of demand," said Jim Hanna, Starbucks' director of environmental impact and global responsibility. "We need to create demand for recyclers for our products."

In other words, companies that normally provide recycling services don't want (and won't accept) Starbucks' plastic-filmed paper cups.

So Starbucks is finding new ways to use the disposable cups. Beginning this fall Starbucks stores in the Chicago area will begin to send all of their used "unrecyclable" cups to Wisconsin, where a Georgia Pacific paper mill will recycle them into napkins. This effort is similar to what Coca Cola Co. did in South Carolina to fix their recycling issues by investing \$60 million in a plant that creates new soda bottles out of old ones and other recycled plastic.

Although these initiatives aren't required by law, there are other legal issues arising in other parts of the country. Seattle law, similar to law in Ontario and San Francisco, now requires all coffee shops to provide recyclable "to-go" packaging, and in the past few weeks, recycling and compost bins have been put into 90 Starbucks stores. These efforts help promote recycling, but don't resolve the problem of the "unrecyclable" Starbucks cups.

Starbucks claimed that the paper cup was their only option, and insist that the cups contain 10-percent post-consumer recycled fiber, and can be composted in parts of the country. They plan to continue to work towards their long term goal of having only 100% reusable or recyclable cups by 2015. Groups such as the As You Sow Foundation, who led a shareholder initiative this year to encourage Starbucks to recycle, are pleased with the coffee powerhouse's recent efforts.

"Their goal is not just to have recycling bins in stores but to find markets so all those paper cups actually get recycled," said the director of corporate social responsibility at As You Sow, Conrad MacKerron.

For coffeeholics, the current issue may not halt their trips to the biggest coffee chain in the world, but ethical consumers everywhere can rest assured they are not adding to the issue by using reusable mugs. Starbucks' cold coffee tumbler is a great alternative to the disposable cup for green caffeine junkies that want to be green without giving up their daily venti energy boost.

Photo Credits: Photo courtesy of greenopolis.com