

REDUCE, REUSE, REFILL

Reducing your plastic waste one cup at a time



Plastic has a drastic effect on our ecosystems. From disposable cups to waterbottles, these expendable containers can be found virtually everywhere in increasing amounts, and are an immense barrier blocking humanity's path to a clean and sustainable environment.

Cold Hard Plastic

"There's not a day I don't cash out around a dozen customers buying them," says Sarah H., a cashier at a Mississauga Loblaws, about plastic bottles of water that often come in packs of 24.

The local number seems to be an unfortunate fact but the magnitude of this massacre skyrockets when the scale is enlarged, with a 2017 *The Guardian* article revealing that one million plastic waterbottles are sold internationally each minute.

In its most deadly form, disposable plastic bottles are a tough opponent for the environment to beat.

Credit: Gabrielle Michael

Disposable plastics in all its forms, especially Starbucks cups and the waterbottles Sarah mentions, is one of the environment's largest predators. Take a look at the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, for example. This vortex of plastic waste located between Japan and the US West Coast is a hoard of humanity's plastic debris that has been recklessly tossed into our waters.

Plastic does not disintegrate — it simply breaks down into microplastics. So while the Pacific Ocean is littered with a majority of the 50 million waterbottles Americans purchased last year, according to *Ban The Bottle*, a larger yet less obvious problem exists. Due to the composition of this material, it is impossible to accurately measure the size of the vortex that has become home to our waste. Yet with around 70% of plastic debris sinking to the bottom of the sea, it's no surprise that the waters of the Pacific Ocean are tainted so horrifically and consumers like you and I are at fault for the graveyard our waters have become.

Excuses, excuses

It's inconvenient; I never know when to bring it.

It's too expensive.

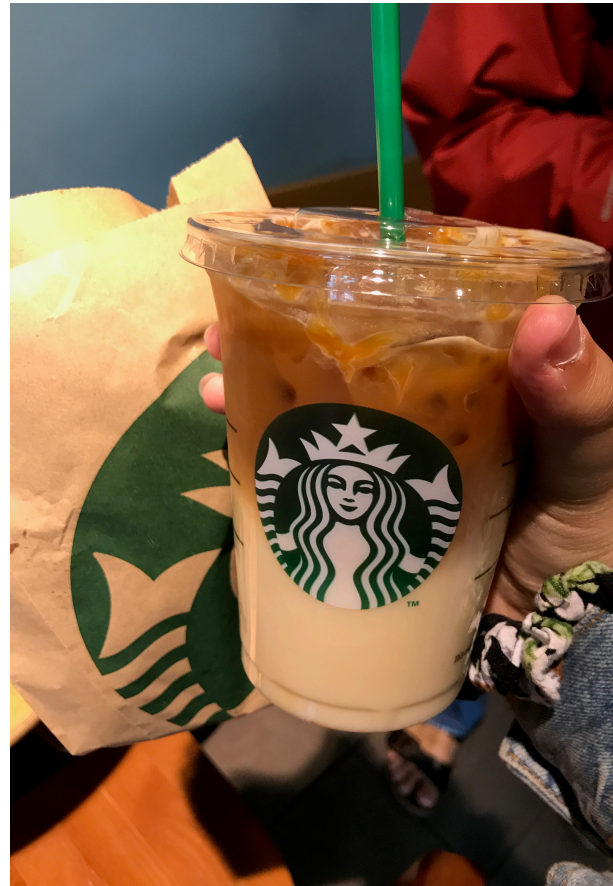
What harm does one plastic bottle do?

These are some of the qualms people have with replacing disposable plastic with reusable alternatives, unaware or uncaring of the fact that an effortless exchange will immensely benefit the environment. As well, these disposable bottles cannot be reused or subjected to non-average temperatures as the chemicals within the plastic will leach into the water. [Here Real Simple](#) offers the benefits (and links!) to reusable bottles as cheap as \$8 — a far better alternative to bottled water ranging from \$1 to \$4 each.

The situation at Starbucks franchises is equally as grim. They have tackled the issue of reducing paper waste by selling a reusable cup that can be purchased for \$1, and offering a 10¢ discount on any hot drink served in that cup. While the brand has reduced the amount of paper waste, the shocking amount of plastic polluting our environment is a much larger and pressing issue.

While Starbucks is already on the road to becoming a more sustainable company in regards to their paper cups, their plastics have been left in the dust. The company itself has noted there needs to be a change in their iced cups, stating in their 2016 Performance Report, "We aim to double the recycled content in the hot cup and explore alternative materials for cold cups."

Starbucks has released a plethora of reusable cups in an attempt to attract customers from all walks of life. But their attempts have proven futile: more often than not, there are shelves next to the cash register, stocked with reusable cups that are collecting dust when they could be reducing your ecological footprint and saving you money. And with the holiday season wrapping up, clearances on these containers reduce their price further!



Starbucks is one of the world's largest coffee chains. They're also one of the leading contributors to plastic pollution.

Credit: Gabrielle Michael

“The thing is,” comments Ryan W., who has worked with Starbucks franchises in the GTA for almost two years, “I don’t think people know about all the great alternatives.” He says most people don’t know that they have the option to request their drink in a ceramic cup if they plan on staying in store. He also notes that Starbucks does not “double cup” their drinks and offers customers recycled-material sleeves instead.

This seems to be the consensus amongst employees of the brand. “Most people don’t think twice about their cups,” says Vicky L., a barista at a local Starbucks. “On a good day, I think about twenty people bring their own cups.” Her Mississauga Starbucks serves approximately 350 drinks per day. The ratio is not a good one.

Water we going to do about it?

As science advances, new consequences related to drinking from plastic bottles have come to light. The repercussions of BPAs, chemicals (outlawed in Canada since 2008) within these bottles, are shy in comparison to the newly discovered health effects. *Livestrong* lists some of the many health issues linked to disposable bottles as, effects on: the nervous and reproductive systems, hormones and the performance of the endocrine system, and fertility issues.

The argument defending the use of disposable waterbottles is a needless one. Despite the undeniable impact on the environment, the money wasted on purchasing overpriced packages of them, and the adverse health effects, consumers continue to buy disposable waterbottles.

When it all boils down, both consumers and producers are to blame for the startling amount of plastic pollution in the environment, yet we can easily become the solution. Gradually phasing out these plastics sounds daunting, but the feat is not entirely impossible. For example, York University has not sold disposable bottles since 2015 and has opted to install filtered water fountains.

Producers of disposable plastics have evolved their polluting products into more sustainable ones but there is still a long way to go. As the largest coffee chain in the world with locations in over 62 countries, Starbucks has a responsibility to exemplify and execute sustainable and eco-friendly practices that begin and end with their cups. Disposable waterbottle companies like Nestle have prioritized convenience over sustainability and simply slimmed the caps of their products in their solution to the issue of plastic pollution. Disposable plastics could very well lead to the environment’s demise if not reduced, reused, and refilled.