



GreenTip
How Do You Measure Up?

Disposable Cups: A Workplace Dilemma

Disposable cups, especially disposable coffee cups, have been on the increase for a long time. Convenience, portability and cost are contributing factors, as is our changing culture. Back in the days of Leave It to Beaver, workers stopped in at the neighborhood café for a cup of coffee that they drank at the counter or had with their made-to-order breakfast. Now, fast-paced lifestyles propel us into take-out coffee shops or drive-thru lines where we grab a cup and sip it during our commute to work. Even in the workplace, there is often a stack of disposable cups waiting beside the coffee pot.



Consider these facts:

- If you drink coffee from a disposable cup every day of the week, YOU are contributing about 23 pounds to the waste stream over the course of a year!
- Currently, 25 BILLION Styrofoam cups alone are thrown away annually! Think about how high that number would climb if disposable paper and plastic cups were added.
- Styrofoam and plastic cups are produced from petroleum (oil), are not biodegradable, and have the potential to contaminate water supplies and to cause negative health impacts.
- Paper cups, though biodegradable, use lots of energy and natural resources to produce.

Some environmentally friendly alternatives:

- Stop purchasing disposable cups for use at the workplace and consider providing each employee with one reusable cup or mug instead. These mugs could be used by workers at outside coffee shops as well as in-house coffee machines. Depending upon the funds budgeted for disposables, the initial investment for reusable mugs may be recouped quite quickly!
- If there's a local coffee haunt near the workplace, consider negotiating with the management to get a reduced price for workers who bring in their reusable cups and/or mugs.
- If purchasing reusable cups or mugs isn't an option, consider asking workers to bring in reusable cups and mugs – even extras they may have around the house that could be used for visitors.
- Educate workers about the negative impacts that result from using disposable cups and mugs – put up posters in the break room and e-mail pertinent information.

For additional information or assistance with an office initiative email sheim@co.guilford.nc.us.