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LEAFY GREENS

Finding the eco-friendly solution

Starbucks Greens its Coffee Cups

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by Kirsten Hudson

Tags: [Starbucks](#), [coffee cup](#), [coffee cup recycling](#), [plastic recycling](#), [recyclable cups](#), [recyclable coffee cups](#), [polyethylene terephthalate](#), [PET](#), [PETE](#), [single-use coffee cups](#), [certifiably recyclable](#), [recycling locations](#), [environmental impact](#), [post-consumer recycled fiber](#), [PCF](#), [virgin wood fiber](#), [recycling systems](#), [polypropylene](#), [PP](#), [greenhouse gases](#), [reusable cups](#), [green](#), [green cups](#)

As I write this blog post, my [Starbucks](#) iced caramel macchiato sits on my desk in a [type one polyethylene terephthalate](#) (PET or PETE) plastic cup. Although this cup can be recycled at most locations (some recycling programs only accept PETE in [bottle form](#)), Starbucks is still working to make all of its cups recyclable.

Last October, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz [promised](#) to make all of Starbucks' single-use coffee cups recyclable by 2012. Starbucks' [website](#) contradicts this statement slightly saying its goal is to develop and launch recyclable cups by 2012 but to make 100 percent of its cups reusable or recyclable by 2015.

On May 12 Starbucks held a summit with all of the representatives of its paper and plastic cup chain as the latest step toward fulfilling that promise. The summit discussed the practicality of cup recycling. Research presented at the [summit](#) showed that Starbucks' paper coffee cups are already certifiably recyclable under the standards of the [Fibre Box Association](#), a non-profit organization representing the corrugated industry. The problem lies in providing proper receptacles to recycle the cups. Starbucks may implement a test program in Manhattan to place special bins in stores to collect paper cups and bags and then send them to Staten Island's Pratt Industries for recycling. The summit also discussed better labeling on the cups, such as an identifiable brown stripe, to promote recycling.



Starbucks is working to reduce the environmental impact of its paper and plastic cups.
Photo Courtesy Starbucks

Before the summit, Starbucks had already taken some steps to reduce the environmental impact of its cups. In 2006 Starbucks launched a [paper cup](#) containing post-consumer recycled fiber (PCF), which has saved more than 44,000 tons of virgin wood fiber; however, the cups still can't be recycled in many recycling systems. In 2008 Starbucks replaced its PETE [cold cup](#) with a polypropylene (PP) alternative. [PP cups](#) use less plastic and emit fewer greenhouse gasses during their production than PETE cups. If this fact is true though, I'm wondering why the Starbucks cup sitting beside me is a PETE cup, not a PP cup.

Besides working to make its single-use cups recyclable, Starbucks also encourages its customers to bring reusable cups. Many stores take 10 cents off the price of a beverage if customers bring their own to-go mug. Starbucks also provides ceramic mugs for customers staying in the store, although in my experience, Starbucks employees never ask if you want your [coffee](#) in a mug; they automatically put your drink in a to-go cup – not a very good step for encouraging customers to adopt environmentally friendly coffee drinking practices.



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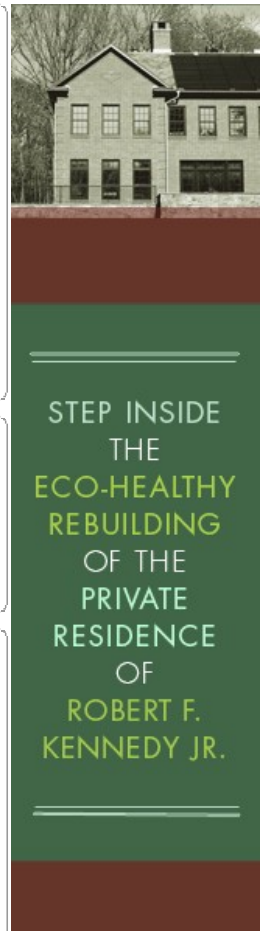
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Starbucks’ practices aren’t perfect, but at least the company is attempting to green itself. I should follow Starbucks’ example and get my morning joe in my own [to-go mug](#).

How do you make your coffee drinking more eco-friendly? Leave me a comment and let me know.

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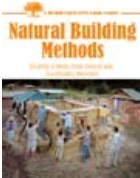
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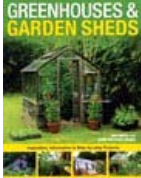
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