

Sustainability Project

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SUSTAINABILITY

When I first thought about how I would go about this project, I knew I wanted to make a real environmental impact in my own life – not just blue-sky lip service we so often see, even from so-called activists. With this in mind, I looked at the aspects of my everyday life where I was consuming, like food, water, electricity, and fossil fuels. Since I don't eat very much these days and have few gadgets, I decided to concentrate on water, with some effort towards reducing my daily dependence on fossil fuels. I entered into a carpooling arrangement with friend in Electrical Techniques, Tyler. We both live in Trenton, and carpooling saves me from driving 30.8 kilometers round-trip from my home to the college. More importantly, however, was my damaging dependence on bottled water. All humans need water to survive, but due to my recent metabolic surgery it is imperative for me to stay well-hydrated, as I cannot get enough fluid in fast enough to recover like normal people. Hence, I'm always sipping. I was incensed that a 500mL bottle of water in a Loyalist vending machine cost me \$1.50 a turn, so I purchased a re-fillable Camelbak bottle from the Loyalist bookstore. It soon paid for itself, as I have not purchased a single disposable bottle of water since.

The college has hydration stations set up in its buildings, with the most popular one located just outside the gym. The last time I checked, it had saved over fifty thousand 500mL disposable water bottles – not to mention to other thousands saved by the other hydration stations.

Environmentally, my water bottle crusade hardly makes a dent compared to these figures, but I have avoided the purchase of at least 100 plastic water bottles and saved a staggering \$150.00. I see plenty of re-fillable containers around Loyalist, so this idea is rapidly gaining traction. The only drawback I worry about, though, is that my re-fillable container still has to be manufactured and transported to its point of sale. The bite valve is medical-grade silicone, and the bottle itself out of "BPA-Free Eastman Tritan™ Copolyester"¹. Since all plastic is made using and shipped using some form of petroleum product, there is a definite environmental impact to using these bottles – but I believe that since disposable plastic water bottles have a criminally low recycling rate of 13% in the United States alone², that the use of re-fillable containers far offsets their usage of fossil fuels for production and transport.

Socially, I've enjoyed chatting with fellow pre-health classmates while we trek to the nearest hydration station to fill up our bottles. I've also managed to convince my niece to eschew disposable bottles in favour of her own re-fillable bottle, and she reports that her small personal change is inspiring her high school classmates to do the same. Engaging youthful consciences is an excellent thing, whether or not we have to do it by pointing out the fiscal savings first or not. The only drawback I have personally experienced is some mild, good-natured chiding from friends and family, but the upside is that I can engage without high-handed preaching.

In the future, I hope that I can maintain my sense of environmental responsibility. While I will be forced to forgo carpooling in the coming years for nursing placements and my eventual career, the moderate amount of greenhouse gas emissions I have accomplished so far this year are worth it. Drinking water from a re-fillable container, however, will be much easier. It won't take long before I've saved hundreds or thousands of dollars, and prevented the same number of bottles from being produced, shipped, and consumed. As previously mentioned, the production and shipping of such containers remain a concern, but it is definitively the lesser of two evils. There are no social drawbacks that I can foresee, or at least none that I can't handle. Change is more palatable and long-lasting if begun slowly, thoughtfully, and with due diligence. We've seen the results of sudden economic and social change throughout history, and it is hardly beneficial. The majority of people these days, I find, are keen to save the environment but unwilling to make the necessary lifestyle changes so as to avoid inconvenience – but I fear it is impossible to avoid a very inconvenient truth.

References

1. Retrieved from <http://www.camelbak.com/en/Canada/Sports-Recreation/Bottles/2012-eddy-75L.aspx>
2. Retrieved from <http://greenliving.nationalgeographic.com/water-bottle-pollution-2947.html>