



THE LAST STRAW

The editorial is an opinion held by the editorial board of the newspaper and is a collaboration of the board. It needs a simple majority to pass. This month's vote was 6-0. To contact the editorial board, please email us at jhsblackandwhite.com or visit us in room 622.

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More than 500 million plastic straws are used every day in the United States alone, according to Eco-Cycle, a nonprofit recycling organization. In restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores and even schools, plastic straws are unnecessarily used and sold in enormous quantities. This consistent overuse of plastic straws is causing a large environmental and ethical problem, resulting in many corporations making efforts to decrease their plastic straw use.

While it is true that the majority of plastic use is wasteful and unnecessary, many disabled people rely on plastic straws to consume liquids. Complete elimination of plastic straws, a direction this country is quickly moving toward, would not be fair to the disabled community. Therefore, there should be certain exceptions for the plastic straw ban.

Because plastic straws are small and lightweight, they are often lost or diverted during the recycling process, causing them to end up in the ocean or in landfills. While plastic straws make up only a tiny amount of the plastic trash polluting our world’s oceans, their size makes them very dangerous to marine life. Plastic straws entangle animals in the ocean and are consumed by fish, adding an ethical concern to a massive environmental issue.

Many large corporations have pledged to cease or at least decrease their plastic straw use, Starbucks being one of the most famous companies to do so. Starbucks recently decided to take initiative and find a solution to this global issue, making a goal to end plastic straw use at their stores by 2020. “For our partners and customers,

this is a significant milestone to achieve our global aspiration of sustainable coffee, served to our customers in more sustainable ways,” Kevin Johnson, president and chief executive officer for Starbucks, said in a press release.

Instead of using plastic straws, Starbucks will begin using strawless plastic lids – an item much easier to recycle. Their frappuccino will be the one exception to the straw ban; it will have a straw made from paper or compostable plastic. These straws will only be available to customers who order frappuccinos.

Many disabled people rely on plastic straws to consume liquids, and it is not fair to them to be denied plastic straws. Sallie Hedgepeth, a special education teacher, agrees that the amount of plastic straw use should be significantly decreased, but that there have to be certain exceptions. “I would support it for the most part,” Hedgepeth said. “The time that it is a problem is when there are certain students, particularly in special education, who are unable to drink with a cup, even with the support of a sippy cup.”

While she personally uses metal straws instead of plastic straws, this alternative would not work for her students who rely on straws. “That’s not always appropriate for certain students either because the metal, for whatever reason, it doesn’t work with their mouth or they want to bite the metal and it would hurt their teeth,” Hedgepeth said. “I think there’s always going to be some people who need an alternative method.”

Currently, there is one student who relies on plastic straws in Hedgepeth’s class. This student needs a plastic straw due to a lack of mobility. If he were to be denied plastic straws, he would spill his drink all over himself, and paper straws would also not work, as they would dissolve in his mouth. This is just one example of a person who would be greatly affected by the elimination of plastic straws, and Hedgepeth said she has taught in classes where 11 or 12 students needed plastic straws.

PLASTIC STRAW FACTS

In the U.S. on average 500 million straws are used every day. That’s enough to wrap the earth 2.5 times or fill yankee stadium nine times a year.

Of all the plastic in the ocean straws only make up about 4% but, that’s still over 2000 tons of straws.

The average straw weights 1/67 or about .42 of a gram

People use straws for a couple of minutes but once they are thrown away they can last for a life time or longer.

For less than ten dollars you can buy a reusable stainless steel straw on amazon.

Straws are made out of a plastic called polypropylene. It is bad for the reproductive system. It can mimic the female hormone estrogen, which can cause problems with fertility and conceiving.