



## Make plastic straws, cutlery available by request only

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The editorial in last week's Bee Newspapers on the single use Keurig Cup was spot on in showing how convenience technology can have unintended consequences.

Managing Editor David Sherman painted a vivid picture on how the K-Cup has removed the office interaction around the coffee pot. He also pointed out that items that used to be recyclable (like the metal coffee cans) have been traded for multi-layered packaging that cannot be recycled locally. I would like to focus more on the recycling aspect.

The K-Cup is the poster child of greenwashing by industry. Consumers expect to be able to recycle anything with the chasing-arrows symbol on the package, and manufacturers, like Keurig, play along with this by stating that their products are recyclable. Technically, the cups are a recyclable plastic, but they are too small to be sorted once they reach a recycling center. Materials that cannot be sorted are sent to the landfill.

Although the K-Cup is small, the amount is adding up fast: 10.5 billion K-Cups were sold by Keurig in 2015 (the last year of publicly reported sales data). But this is not the only small single-use plastic that is adding volume to our landfills. Restaurants automatically add plastic cutlery and condiment packets to the bottom of the takeout bag. More often than not, these items are tossed without being used. And like the K-Cup, plastic cutlery does not biodegrade – the plastic fork tossed today may be intact hundreds of years from now.

New York state passed legislation that will ban Styrofoam containers and cups as of Jan. 1, 2022. I challenge local communities to pass a companion bill prohibiting businesses from handing out plastic cutlery, straws or condiment packets unless the consumer requests it. This would be a cost savings for local businesses and a win for the environment.

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