

At Starbucks: Paper or plastic?

New \$1 reusable cup on its way

Wendy Koch

@wendykoch
USA TODAY

Amid public pressure to curb trash from disposable cups, Starbucks is rolling out a novel possible solution today: a \$1 reusable tumbler.

The Seattle-based coffee giant will start selling the plastic cups, bearing its logo and resembling the paper version, at all its company-owned stores in the USA and Canada in a bid to get customers to kick their throw-away habit. It will give a dime discount on each refill, so the cup pays for itself after 10 uses.

The \$1 tumbler is the latest effort to address criticism that food and beverage retailers need to reduce the

number of disposable cups and containers that end up in landfills or litter streets and waterways. Thousands of people have signed petitions on Change.org, a website promoting social change, urging companies to promote reusable options and abandon polystyrene foam packaging, which is rarely recycled.

McDonald's began testing a paper cup at some of its stores last year, and Dunkin' Donuts plans to do the same, but neither requires its stores to offer a refill discount to customers with reusable tumblers. Jamba Juice, which plans to phase out foam cups this year, says it offers a dime discount to those bringing in clean reusable ones, but very few do so.

Starbucks' Jim Hanna says the company, in addition to working with paper mills to get more of its disposable paper cups recycled, has long sold reusable tumblers, but it expects the low price of its new one will prompt change. He says that its test-market-

Coffee lovers can buy a tumbler to save the environment - and a dime on each refill.

ing in 600 Pacific Northwest stores boosted the number of reusable cups 26% in those stores last November compared with the same month a year earlier.

"It's not a burden for people to buy two or three," he says, noting Starbucks will clean them for customers with a boiling-water rinse before each refill. The cups, made in China for less than \$1, have interior lines to denote a "tall" or "grande" size.

Others are skeptical. "A bigger factor is human behavior. I have friends

who are environmentalists, and they have trouble remembering their mug," says Conrad MacKerron of As You Sow, a non-profit group advocating corporate social responsibility. "We're so used to this disposable culture."

MacKerron says that although Starbucks has been a leader in cup reform, he's disappointed it has sharply reduced its goal of having 25% of its cups be reusable by 2015 to 5%. He says Starbucks has a "high-end," eco-minded clientele but has had limited success: 1.9% of its cups were multiuse in 2011, up from 1.5% in 2009.

Some retailers have cited concerns that reusing cups could cause cross-contamination of germs, says Miriam Gordon of the California chapter of Clean Water Action, an environmental group that advocates for reuse. But she says Starbucks' cup cleaning solves the issue, and its new tumblers are a "step in the right direction."



STARBUCKS

Starbucks has long sold tumblers, but it expects the low price of its new one will prompt change.