



Stainless Steel Straws

by Nicole C Fitz | Jul 5, 2018 | Greener Than Before, Sustainability

I have to admit that I have a bag full of plastic straws in my possession. I was one of the people who used them daily and didn't consider the damage they were doing to the environment.

Just like a lot of other people, their small size kept me from being concerned. I didn't add up the number of straws I used in a week, a month, a year. I didn't multiply that by every person like me who uses them every day, even at home.

Consider every restaurant meal from every restaurant – coffee stirrers in the morning, straws for lunch and dinner, drink stirrers at the bar. I didn't multiply those numbers by every restaurant in every city in every state across the U.S.

Honestly, I don't know what those real figures are, though I tried hard to find them. But that's no excuse to assume that the total number is within reason.

Straws are not recycled due to their size.

People say that the “500 million straws a day in the United States” claim is incorrect. It was a guess by a kid doing a science project. But is it really that inaccurate? Consider how many straws just one restaurant passes out in a day. And how many restaurants there are in the United States? I think

500 million might actually be very accurate.

I don't have the data to back this up. I'm just taking a realistic look at my straw use and multiplying that by every person in the U.S. who buys a coffee in the morning, grabs a meal on the go for lunch or dinner, or uses straws at home.

The specific number doesn't really matter. Whatever the number is, it's too high.

The Real Issue

Straws are not recycled due to their size.

I didn't know that even though straws may be made out of recyclable plastic (polypropylene resin ID 5), most recycling plants can't recycle them because of their size.

According to livegreen.recyclebank.com, “As plastic travels down conveyor belts while being sorted, small items like bottle caps and straws fall through the cracks and end up being sent to the landfill.”

The number of straws collected in beach clean-ups on the coasts of the U.S. prove this.

Before I was aware of the damage to the environment that I was contributing to, I did come to the realization that continually spending money on a one-time use product was a waste. It's true, you can wash and re-use plastic straws. But ah...no.

So I wisely invested in bigger, thicker, (also plastic) straws that gave me a much less queasy feeling about washing and reusing. I thought that I had done something really good by using these. It couldn't get any better right? I even found a way to wash them, before I knew that there were special straw cleaners. I got a couple of fuzzy sticks, wound them together, made it nice and soapy and voilà – clean straw.



I've had them for a few years and, because they are durable plastic, I could technically have them forever.

An Alternative Option

Stainless Steel Drinking Straws

Finally, I came upon stainless steel straws. It was late in the straw game. But I found them, and that's what matters. Of course, my first thought was, What? Why? My teeth will somehow repel this weirdness. Then I looked over at the coffee tumbler that I took to work every day. Yep, stainless steel. My teeth have been fine with the tumbler. They'll be fine with the straw.

Now that I knew about stainless steel straws, I just had to find them. That same week, I saw them at Walmart, right across the aisle from the plastic straws. They are also available at Amazon, Etsy, Bed Bath and Beyond and just about everywhere.



The Opposition

For the people who believe, like I did, that they are not that big, or there aren't that many being used, or even that they can be recycled, please see above.

There are some genuine concerns when it comes to drinking straws. Some people need to use straws due to being physically impaired, having sensitive teeth, or taking medications which make them sensitive to metals.

Luckily, there are even more options by a number of manufacturers. Soft silicone straws, large re-usable dishwasher safe plastic straws for shakes and smoothies, bamboo straws, good old-

fashioned paper straws, and glass straws. There are also carrying cases (some steel straws come with them) and keychain straws that guarantee you'll have one with you wherever you go. The list goes on and on.

No One Thing. . .

Will using stainless steel straws stop plastic straw production in its tracks? No.

Is it actually making a difference? Yes. It is a small step that will have a huge effect in time.

The pounds of plastic floating in the ocean didn't just show up yesterday. But small changes today will definitely make for a better tomorrow.

Congratulations to Seattle for banning plastic straws and utensils! We are on our way.