

Do foam cups have advantages?

by Munju Ravindra

"Foam cups have environmental advantages," says the slogan of the most recent campaign to have consumers accept foam products.

Public awareness of the environmental hazards of CFCs has led people to question their safety. At Dalhousie, Beaver Foods is distributing information sheets published by the Dart Container corporation, that deny the use of CFCs in their foam cups. These sheets, which are being given to students on their food trays, argue that disposable foam cups have environmental advantages over paper cups and china or glass mugs.

These 'environmental fact sheets' state that foam rates better than china, glass, or paper in terms of energy and water conservation, waste to energy conversion, recyclability, landfill contamination, air pollution, impact on ozone layer, and price.

Although the facts presented appear to be true, Anne Corbin, coordinator of the Neighborhood

Network Project at Ecology Action Centre says that they are misleading and biased, leaving out important facts. Corbin says that regardless of whether or not the foam cups use CFCs in their manufacturing process, the fact remains that the oil and petroleum products used to make foam come from non-renewable resources. Paper on the other hand, is made from a renewable resource, and glass is totally recyclable.

not retrieved and instead goes directly to landfills. As facilities to recycle foam do not currently exist in Nova Scotia, she suggests that Beaver Foods should collect used foam cups and ship them to recycling plants elsewhere.

Lisa Hernon, manager of Beaver Foods at Dalhousie, says that Beaver foods is distributing these fact sheets in order to make students aware of their environmental commitment. In the past, she says,

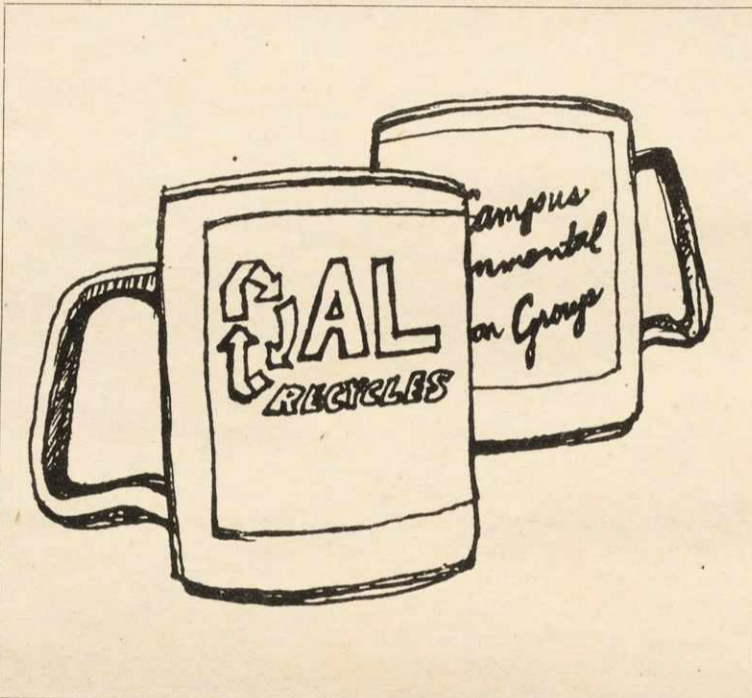
roMug', made of recycled plastic. To encourage students to use this mug, it is being sold at cost, and students receive the first cup of coffee free. Hernon adds that anyone who brings their own reusable mug will receive a discount on coffee or tea.

Hernon does not feel that it is hypocritical to advertise a reusable mug next to information promoting the use of foam, because, she says, students cannot be forced to buy their own reusable mug.

Although she acknowledges that the environmental fact sheet is biased, Hernon suggests that it is

perhaps a defense by the foam companies against anti-foam arguments. She emphasizes that it is important for students to know the other side.

Hernon says that Beaver Foods cannot provide reusable dishware because of the cost factor. She adds that Beaver Foods will not collect used foam dishes as it would be too expensive to ship them to Ontario or the U.S. for recycling. Anne Corbin, however, challenges this policy, saying that when dealing with the environment, "cost cannot be the bottom line".



Stop bleaching

OTTAWA (CUP) - Greenpeace is getting ready for a cross-Canada campaign to stamp out chlorine bleaching of paper.

The focus of the campaign is the federal government, which should force pulp and paper companies to stop bleaching, said Greenpeace's Brian Killeen.

"It can end. There are alternatives to bleaching paper with chlorine, like using oxygen bleaching or simply not bleaching at all," said Killeen, a marine biologist.

Dioxins, a by-product of chlorine bleaching, are carcinogenic, and have been proven to produce birth defects and liver disorders in many species of animals.

"Once in our environment, these chemicals wreak havoc," said Killeen. "Animals - from ducks to dolphins - are affected. Whole fishing grounds are destroyed. People are losing their jobs and are being poisoned.

"And it's not just the rivers and fisheries. Some of these poisons are being found in bleached paper goods, like coffee filters, paper cups, bandages and milk cartons. Dioxins are getting into our bodies this way, just to make paper white."

Greenpeace wants the federal environment ministry to adopt tough new regulations limiting dangerous discharges from pulp and paper mills.

In addition, although it is true that foam is inert and will not biodegrade to release toxins, it nonetheless contributes to landfill bulk, and adds to the already existing problem of garbage volume.

Most CFC-free cups are made with pentane, another type of hydrocarbon. Although pentane is not known to have adverse effects on the ozone layer, it is thought to contribute to ground-level haze and therefore to general air pollution.

Although the fact sheet argues that foam is totally recyclable, Corbin argues that most foam is

they have had complaints and questions about CFCs in foam cups, and this year they decided to inform students of the types of products they are using.

Hernon says that whenever possible, Beaver Foods tries to use recycled products. They are currently using recycled paper towels and paper bags, and they are considering using paper and plastic plates. She says that they cannot use paper or plastic cups, because of complaints of students burning themselves on hot coffee or soup.

To meet the demand for reusable cups, Beaver Foods has recently begun selling an 'Envi-

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