

Trump is getting rid of paper straws. That's (partly) a good thing, environmentalists say

Half a billion straws are used in the United States every day, according to a popular — but perhaps not the most scientific — estimate.

The biggest buyer: the federal government, which buys more straws than any other group in the US. Straws are used in national parks, federal buildings and embassies, among other places.

This week, President Donald Trump reversed course on a Biden administration environmental initiative that had eliminated single-use plastics like straws in federal buildings. The common alternative: paper straws.

“We’re going back to plastic straws. (Paper straws) don’t work. They break. They explode if something’s hot. They don’t last very long, like a matter of minutes, sometimes a matter of seconds. It’s a ridiculous situation,” Trump said

from the Oval Office on Monday, when he signed an executive order on the matter.

The executive order directs federal agencies to make sure that “paper straws are no longer provided” in agency buildings.

Many Americans agree with the president’s dislike for paper straws, including critics like Jon Stewart who proclaimed on this week’s “Daily Show”: “OK, he’s right on this one.”

But for some in the straw industry, the conversation has moved beyond paper versus plastic.

“We agree that paper straws don’t work and they’re not a good solution,” said Ken Jacobus, CEO of Good Start Packaging, an eco-friendly **compostable** food packaging company. “What’s disappointing about the executive order is that it makes paper straws kind of a red herring to get consumers to believe that our only choices are paper and plastic when it comes to straws and the industry has already moved way past that.”

Good Start Packaging makes straws, utensils and to-go containers for restaurants and federal facilities. Their straws are made from canola oil and can biodegrade on land and in the ocean.

In 2020, during his first term, Trump signed the Save Our Seas 2.0 Act designed to “raise international awareness of plastic waste and combat marine debris.”

But back at the **Oval Office** on Monday, Trump said, “I don’t think plastic is going to affect a shark much as they’re munching their way through the ocean.”

Some major retailers have gone straw-free, such as Starbucks in 2020. The company currently offers compostable straws upon request.

And 75% of US adults say they’ll have to make at least one sacrifice in their lifetime because of climate change, according to December report from Pew Research Center.

“More and more people are concerned about the environment, especially young people, but... (the straw) has to function,” said Jacobus.

The costs of paper vs. plastic

Part of Trump's executive order was aimed at reducing the price of paper straws, which can cost between five to 12 cents per unit. Plastic straws cost under two cents per unit, according to Clean Water Action, a group working to elect environmental candidates. But biodegradable straws made by Good Start Packaging cost just shy of three cents, Jacobus said.

“We're having problems finding landfill space for all this stuff. Less than 10% of plastic is recycled. The rest of it goes to landfills, and we're running out of space for landfills. It's actually becoming an economic **imperative**,” Jacobus said.

Despite their higher cost and flimsy architecture, paper straws are thought to be less toxic. But Jackie Nuñez, advocacy and engagement manager for Plastic Pollution Coalition, found out through testing several paper straws from various manufacturers that they aren't as safe to drink from as people might think.

“The **irony** is that a lot of the paper straws that were coming on the market, the low-grade ones that I wouldn’t use anyways, they’re full of toxic dyes and glues,” said Nuñez, who is also the founder of the Last Plastic Straw, an anti-plastic straw campaign. Most of those paper straws with toxins are imported from China, she notes. Nuñez said she has tested paper straws from the US that have no toxic chemicals.

Jacobus and Nuñez say reusable straws are the best for the environment and the **bottom line**, but they’re unrealistic for large institutions like museums, national parks and hospitals. And while Trump’s executive order opens the door for plastic straws again, it could also open the floodgates to plastic plates, to-go containers and cups.

“Trump is now enabling federal properties, a huge purchaser of disposable products, to buy Styrofoam, an old-school product... that is super toxic for the environment. That’s what we should be focusing consumers on. No one cares about straws. That ship has sailed,” said Jacobus.

Key vocabularies

Compostable (可堆肥的)

- **Explanation:** A material that can break down naturally and turn into compost, which enriches soil.
- **Sentence:** Many companies now produce compostable packaging to reduce plastic waste.

Oval Office (美國總統辦公室)

- **Explanation:** The official office of the President of the United States.
- **Sentence:** The president signed the new law in the Oval Office, surrounded by advisors and reporters.

Imperative (必要的, 極重要的)

- **Explanation:** Something that is extremely important or necessary.
- **Sentence:** It is imperative to find a sustainable solution for plastic waste before landfills overflow.

Irony (諷刺)

- **Explanation:** A situation where something happens that is the opposite of what is expected, often in a humorous or critical way.
- **Sentence:** The irony is that paper straws, meant to be eco-friendly, sometimes contain harmful chemicals.

Bottom line (關鍵)

- **Explanation:** The most important fact or result, often referring to financial outcomes.
- **Sentence:** The bottom line is that businesses need to balance profit with environmental responsibility.

Reading Comprehension

1. Why did Trump decide to bring back plastic straws in federal buildings?

2. What is the main argument of Ken Jacobus against Trump's executive order?

3. What is the irony mentioned by Jackie Nuñez about paper straws?

4. What concerns does Jacobus have about Trump's order beyond plastic straws?