

Refill Barriers and Benefits Survey 1

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This survey was carried out on Thursday, June 30th, between 11am and 1:00pm. Experimenters with clipboards approached passersby in the Memorial Union and asked for their participation. The goal was to identify the perceived benefits that motivate people to carry a refillable container, as well as the perceived barriers that prevent people from doing it all the time. The sample included 30 participants, all college age or older.

Refilling is rampant

The vast majority of respondents, 87%, reported carrying a refillable container some of the time. In fact nearly half of all respondents, 40%, reported that they were currently carrying a refillable container at the time of the interview. This survey did not distinguish between coffee thermoses or water bottles, so detailed information about what sort of container they were carrying is not available, but it is clear that most people are already comfortable with the concept of refilling.

How often do you Refill?	
always	12 (33%)
usually	8 (27%)
occasionally	6 (20%)
rarely	1 (3%)
never	3 (10%)
total	30

Reasons for refilling

The most common reasons given for why people chose to refill were financial, citing cost savings associated with (A) bringing coffee from home, (B) not purchasing water bottles, and less frequently (C) the REfill discount. Concern for the environment and convenience were also common motivators. Respondents were free to list as many reasons as they wanted, which were then coded as one of the following categories: financial, convenience, environmental, functional, or health. The number of participants mentioning at least one reason in each of the categories is shown in the table at right. The functional reasons included keeping the beverage warm and not spilling, the health reasons included staying hydrated and avoiding toxics in plastics.

Why do you Refill?	
financial	17 (63%)
convenience	9 (33%)
environment	12 (44%)
function	2 (7%)
health	3 (11%)
other	6 (22%)

Reasons for not refilling

Among the 23 people who refilled some of the time but not always, the most frequent reason given why they sometimes did not refill was forgetfulness (87% of respondents in that group). A few (17%) also mentioned dirtiness of the bottle as a deterrent. One respondent said that he used drinking fountains.

Only 3 survey respondents claimed that they never carried a refillable container. All of them said that they had at some point considered carrying one. Their reported reasons were (A) "forgot", (B) "doesn't drink coffee", and (C) "the mug doesn't fit the requirements for being allowed in the union kitchen".

Accessibility to a refillable container did not seem to be a barrier to refilling. Among respondents who sometimes refill it was never mentioned, and when the 3

non-refillers were asked "If you were given a quality, attractive, refillable container, how often would you carry it?", all responded "rarely".

Persuading people to refill

To find out what types of arguments people would be most effective at persuading people to refill, four statements were read at the end of the survey and respondents were asked to rate "How persuasive do you personally find the following arguments, in terms of convincing you to use a refillable container?" Responses were made on a 1-5 scale, where 5 was "very persuasive".

While respondents found all types of arguments fairly compelling, the statement which quoted a concrete dollar amount framed as a direct cost to the individual was rated highest. The statement which appealed to global issues was rated the lowest.

How Persuasive are these Statements? rated 1-5	mean
One of the largest sources of landfill waste from the University is disposable cups.	3.88
The average student can waste over \$30 buying disposable cups each semester, by not taking advantage of the Refill discount offered by coffeeshops and restaurants.	4.31 ^a
The manufacture and transport of disposable cups consumes energy resources, contributing to global warming and our dependence on foreign oil.	3.73 ^b
If everyone on campus refilled, it would prevent tons of waste from entering the landfill.	4.12
Average Rating	4.01

^a significantly different from the mean, $p < .02$

^b trend towards difference from the mean, $p < .06$

Conclusions

While this study provides useful empirical data, it must be interpreted with some caution. The sample was small, and collected in a single session during a summer term. Furthermore the survey did not differentiate between water bottles and coffee/tea thermoses, and there may be important differences between the groups of people using them.

However even with these cautions in mind, these results are very encouraging. They suggest that the majority of UW community members already have some experience refilling, which means we are not faced with the difficult task of trying to convince people to engage in a completely new behavior. Instead we are faced with the simpler task of encouraging people to more consistently engage in a behavior they already see value in. The results also suggest that a message emphasizing the direct cost to individuals of not refilling will be most effective, although all four statements were rated effective.