

Sustainability at Work

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Reusable Dishware (Why switch?)

You Asked, We Answer: Why is reusable dishware the most sustainable option?



Ceramic, glass, metal and heavy duty plastic can all be washed and reused over and over again.

It's the best environmental option.

Reusable dishware will use far less energy and resources over its lifetime than its disposable counterparts (details below).

Even with the energy and water needed to wash items, the overall environmental impact is substantially less than single-use, throw-away items.

It's cheaper in the long run. Over time, many businesses save money by switching to reusables.

It's healthier. Many disposable products have human health impacts during production. The chemical fertilizers and pesticides used in growing some plant-based products can create water and air pollution [2]. Refining fossil fuels used in plastic products can create air pollution [2]. Additionally, some plastic products leach chemicals that can be harmful to people [2].

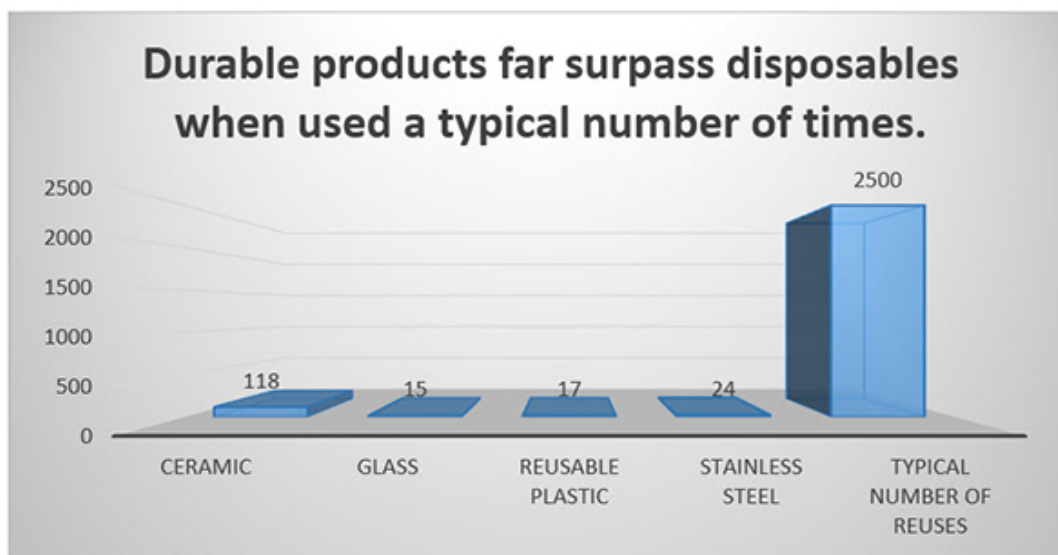
It may be easier than you think. Are your waste containers filled with cups and containers? If they are, your customers (or office mates) are consuming food onsite, and could be using "real" dishware instead.

How many times do you have to reuse durable dishware before it becomes more sustainable than disposables?

In a typical restaurant setting, reusable dishware will use far less energy over its lifetime than its disposable counterparts.

Why? Because the typical restaurant reuses its dishware 2,500 times, and even the most energy intensive durable (ceramic) surpasses its "break-even point" with disposables after 120 uses [3].

The "break-even point" of reusables and disposables varies for different materials, as shown in the graph below, but all quickly pass their break-even points in a restaurant setting.



Graph shows how many times each type of durable dishware needs to be used – all under 120 times - before it reaches the environmental

break-even point with its disposable counterpart. Final column shows the typical number of times durable dishware is reused in a restaurant setting – almost 2500 – which far surpasses the breaking point of all types of durable dishware [3,4,5,7,8].

Really want to dig into the data?

Here are break-even points of different types of durables compared to different types of disposables:



Reusable plastic dishes need to be reused 10 times to be more sustainable than single use plastic, 14 times to be more sustainable than Bagasse, or 17 times to be more sustainable than paper [3,4,10].



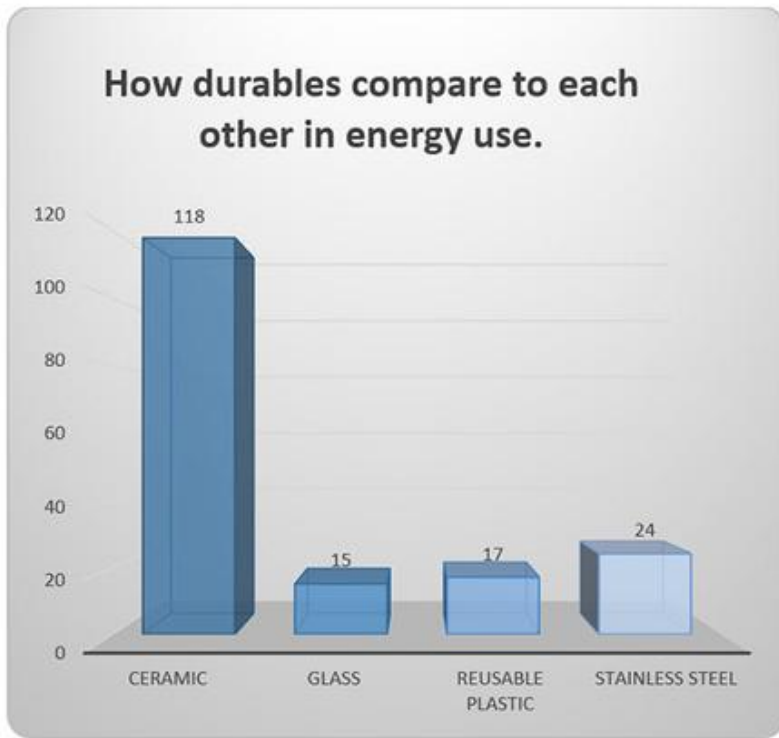
Glassware needs to be reused 15 times to be more sustainable than paper products [4].



Stainless steel needs to be reused 24 times to be more environmentally friendly than paper, and its dishwasher safe and non-toxic [8, 9].



Using ceramic mugs or dishes rather than paper reduces material consumption, air and water pollution, and solid waste after just 60 uses. There are energy savings after 118 uses. [3]



To break-even with its paper counterpart in energy use, ceramic dishware has to be used 118 times, glass 15 times, reusable plastic 17 times, and stainless steel 24 times.

Questions? Ready to start using more reusable items in your workplace, but not sure where to start? Contact us!

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/sustainabilityatwork/article/446472>

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Research conducted in 2014.
