Stakeholder Interviews

Single-Use Plastic Bottle Purchasers

Some students find SPBs fulfill their desire for cheap, easily available water at a lower cost than a reusable bottle. Senior Dana Falcon comments that though she owns reusable bottles, she regularly purchases single-use plastic water bottles so she doesn’t get thirsty throughout the day. Sophomore Lindsay Everhart explains, “For me, it’s a convenience thing. I’m pretty much always running late to class, and I’ll often leave a water bottle in my room...and I’ll just need to grab a water bottle from ETC on my way to class.” Everhart adds that the low-cost nature of SPBs is another factor that keeps her from changing her purchasing habits. “It’s a lot less expensive to buy a single-use bottle than to buy a [reusable] water bottle that I inevitably lose,” she comments.

Sophomore student-athlete Tyrek Funderburk also cites convenience as a major motivating factor in his purchase of SPBs. Though he and his teammates use reusable water bottles during practice, he finds that the lightweight nature and omnipresence of SPBs of water allows him to stay hydrated throughout the day. Though he currently purchases plastic bottles, Funderburk says that he would be interested in exploring alternatives to plastic, such as boxed or aluminum bottled water.

In terms of university disincentives for SPBs, Funderburk says that an increase in price would make him rethink his purchasing behaviors. However, he thinks that the removal of single-use plastic water bottles might just spur students to buy other bottled beverages or go off campus to buy bulk bottled water. Falcon agrees. “Though having [bottled water] in less places would discourage me,” she says, “I’d probably get a different [bottled] drink...or I’d just be thirsty.”

For Everhart, making students come to terms with the grim environmental reality of single-use plastic consumption through an outright campus ban is the best way to reform student behavior. “Although [a ban] seems like a pretty big step,” she continues, “the amount of plastic we use is pretty staggering, statistically.”

Junior Abdul Rehan adds that disseminating information about the safety of campus tap water at Orientation and thereafter could eliminate another reason students buy bottled water.
instead of refill reusable bottles.\textsuperscript{1,2} Everhart suggests that different campus offices (like Admissions) could distribute reusable water bottles in an effort to spur student (or prospective student) adoption and also enjoy free advertising. “We have a pretty environmentally-conscious generation,” she concludes, “so I think the university should use that to our advantage and make people think a little bit more about their actions.”

\textsuperscript{1} http://www.richmondgov.com/dpu/WaterQualityReports.aspx
\textsuperscript{2} https://get-green-now.com/tap-vs-bottled-water-comparison/