

The Cup Debacle  
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Don't you love that nice cold glass of beer? Or that ice cold soda in your hand? Staying hydrated and drinking bodacious beverages are a fundamental part of coming to Telluride Bluegrass, but did you ever stop to wonder about the very vessel that holds it all? Just why did the good folks at Planet Bluegrass decide on this particular cup as the one to house your luscious libations?

Let me tell you, the answer is not small, and the colors not black and white. A decision as seemingly small as what kind of cup to use at Telluride Bluegrass can leave you sitting up at night, biting your nails, or worse yet, throw you into a frenzied nightmare, filled with dancing cups of all shapes and sizes.

Downsizing in ecological footprint, or environmental impact, can be a dizzying journey as you explore all the options around you. The same holds true when looking at the beer beaker of Telluride Bluegrass.

On one side, there is quality. If the cup is hard for the kick-ass KODO volunteers to use, then you might get a foamy beer. If the cup is made out of an unforgiving plastic, it might crack easier and force you to get another. And of course, everyone likes an attractive cup that they can take home to put in the cabinet, or show off to friends at the next bar-b-q. On the other hand, there are the environmental issues: disposable vs. reusable, paper vs. plastic, plastic vs. plastic, and the list goes on.

Festivals are an inherently disposable situation. Thousands of people gather temporarily in one place, eating and drinking from vendors and usually without bringing personal cups, plates and silverware. There are different types of disposables: plastic, paper, and corn-based compostables. Corn? Yep, a plastic that looks and feels like good ol' petroleum-based polymer, only it is made of a resin derived from corn and is fully compostable. Sounds perfect, and many cases it is (did you notice anything new about the disposable plastic ware this year?). However, with 10,000 people over 4 long days, drinking over 500 kegs of beer, is it wise to encourage disposable cups, even if they can be composted? We said no. Why? Because reducing the amount of waste from the get-go is as important, if not more, than recycling it. If we chose disposables, we'd see closer to 80,000 cups than the historical 12,000.

What then? Glass? Heavy, breakable, and health code issues: no. Paper? There's that disposable situation again. Plastic? It's lightweight and durable, and can be made in a form that says "take me home" instead of "toss me," but what type of plastic? It is a sad but true fact that nowhere in the state of Colorado can you, the willing citizen, recycle your plastic cup, even if that familiar

#2 or #1 stamp would lead you to think so. Yet there are states where such a goblet can be recycled. Ah, great. We'll send the cups there. We can put them into a recycle stream where they will get turned into plastic lumber, and maybe even arrive back at Telluride in the form of a park bench. Or the cups could be collected, washed, and reused at other Planet Bluegrass festivals. But what of the fossil fuels used to ship them back and forth, to and fro, the water used washing them, and what of other plastics? #5 plastic is more compact and uses fewer resources than #2 during production, but the only choice for its disposal is the landfill.

So what's the solution? This year you'll see a clear #2 plastic cup, cup collection bins around the festival, KODO volunteers running those collection bins, a cup re-use program at the New Belgium booth in the Green Village, a slightly higher charge for the cup, and the encouragement to take your cup home, like many of you have done for years. The cups that are collected might be reused at other festivals after being sanitized and washed at New Belgium's facility, or they might be shipped away and recycled. And even though all of this is a step in the right direction, it is not the solution. So now I'm asking you: What *is* the solution?

We figure that the brainpower of this fruitful group of festivarians must be huge. Please stop by the New Belgium booth in the Green Village and ask for the Cup Debacle Tablet. On this paper pad you'll be able to record your ideas for ways that next year's bluegrass festival can green up its cup situation (or anything else for that matter).

As you can see, this truly is a cup debacle. And why all the fuss, you ask? Why not go with the traditional cup and forget about recycling or reusing them? Take a look around. Children, mountains, birds; a community surrounds you. These are the reasons why it's important for Telluride Bluegrass to be conscious of its ecological footprint, and we hope you'll join us as we try on a smaller ecological shoe-size.

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