

### The last straw?

As we relax from yesterday's Coastal Cleanup, I think again about all the plastic pieces that we picked up on the edges of our fragile waterways.

One item is the humble drinking straw. I recall using paper straw when I was a child and wondered just what happened to them.

Doing a little research, I found that the first drinking straws were made from natural rye grass. In 1888, Marvin Stone patented the spiral winding process to manufacture the first paper drinking straws.

Stone made his prototype straw by winding strips of paper around a pencil and gluing it together. He then experimented with paraffin-coated manila paper, so the straws would not become soggy while someone was drinking. Marvin Stone decided the ideal straw was 8 1/2-inches long with a diameter just wide enough to prevent things like lemon seeds from being lodged in the tube.

Today, almost all straws are made of one-use plastic packaged in a "sanitary" paper sleeve. They come in a myriad of sizes and colors and some are twisted into designs like a roller coaster.

There are reusable straws such as the ones on sippy cups for children or hospital patients.

If you are a serious straw person, get one of these creative reusable ones.

David Leonhardt makes a dishwasher-safe glass straw. They are available at [www.glassdharma.com](http://www.glassdharma.com) starting at \$7 and are made of borosilicate tubing which is the strongest glass commercially available. These glass straws carry a lifetime guarantee against breakage. They sell soft hemp cases or rigid bamboo cases along with cleaning brushes.

A stainless-steel straw is available from [www.alwaysbrilliant.com](http://www.alwaysbrilliant.com). They sell a stainless-steel StrawSpoon for smoothies and milkshakes. This site has dishwasher safe reusable plastic straws and, what I grew up with, eco-friendly paper straws. Other sites offer bamboo straws and plexiglass straws, so sip away.

### Re-Purposed Hair

When I started backyard composting in the late 1970s, I read that human hair was a great fertilizer with a slow nitrogen release. Hair also prevented weed growth, snail infestation and reduced water evaporation. With that, I routinely brought my hair home from the salon for my compost pile or to put around plants for birds to gather for their nests.

Recently, I read of a new reuse for hair. According to Matter of Trust ([www.matteroftrust.org](http://www.matteroftrust.org)), people shampoo their hair because it gets greasy. Hair is very efficient at collecting oil out of the air and off surfaces like your skin or water. Hair even absorbs petroleum oil.

After the Cosco-Busan oil spill in the San Francisco Bay on November 7, 2007, Matter of Trust and SF Department of the Environment (SFDOE) distributed 1000 hairmats, to help clean up the spill. SFDOE had just received hairmats for their Used Motor Oil Collection Program.

Matter of Trust had been collecting hair from local salons and had turned it into hairmats.

There are over 370,000 hair salons in the US and each collects an average of one pound of hair a day. Right now, most of that goes into the waste stream; but it could be made into hairmats.

Salons and individuals can sign up to send clean hair to a warehouse in the San Francisco area. They also accept used nylon stockings, and natural fibers such as dog fur, horse hair, feathers, and waste wool.

### West Coast Green

West Coast Green will be held at Fort Mason on October 1 through October 3. In addition to lectures and workshops, their trade show will feature over 300 exhibitors showcasing the latest in green and healthy building products. For more information go to [www.westcoastgreen.com](http://www.westcoastgreen.com) or call 1 800-724-4880.

*VALCORE Recycling Board Secretary Jane Bogner's "A Sorted Affair" is published every other week in the Times-Herald. For recycling information call VALCORE Recycling at 645-8258 or visit [www.VALCORErecycling.org](http://www.VALCORErecycling.org).*

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