

Join the Skip the Straw Movement
Conservation Corner – August 2017

The following article was published recently by the Daily Tidings and also presented to the Ashland Conservation Commission at a recent meeting by Louise Shawkat, a member of the ad-hoc Climate and Energy Action Plan Committee that developed the Climate and Energy Action Plan unanimously approved by Council on March 7, 2017.

The Commission felt this article was a great explanation and example of the myriad of small choices and changes individuals (and businesses) can make that add up to making a significant difference in reducing our collective impact on climate change.

Glass straws and paper dolls- childhood memories.
By Louise Shawkat

When I had chicken pox, measles or the too frequent severe sore throat, I had to stay home from school. My cradle was a double bed with four tall posts. I had so much fun cutting out paper dolls and hanging their fancy clothes on lines I strung from one post to another. To sooth my aching body, Ma fixed cool drinks over ice with a clear glass straw. These straws lasted forever. Skipping ahead 50 years, while I was rummaging through a warehouse of medical supplies to take to an orphanage in Kenya, I had a eureka moment: a glass straw! I was delighted to find what I had thought was an obsolete and forgotten object.

The first use of straws is credited to the Sumerians who used gold straws!

Were you aware that the modern day drinking straw was invented in 1888, made of paper, 8 1/2 inches long and just wide enough to prevent citrus seeds from getting caught in it? The paper straw machine was invented in 1906, which allowed the mass production of straws by a cigarette factory, of all places. At that time, straws were used to prevent contacting diseases from unsanitary cups and glasses.

Due to affordability and durability, plastic became straw's material of choice. McDonalds contributed to the plastic straw's trendiness when it offered the extra wide drinking straw. Today, it is routine to get a plastic straw with your beverage whether you want it or not. Straws are expected with every drink. Single use and thrown away, these straws are then seen in storm drains, curbsides, beaches, oceans and inside the stomachs of land and sea creatures. Five hundred million straws are used and disposed of daily in the USA. Fundamentally, they are litter!

Think of the life of a straw (cradle to grave), the manufacturing of the plastic material, fashioning, packaging, shipping, distribution, use and disposal of the straw-for what-minimal 'pleasure'? Think of the consequences of using this throwaway product.

In 2011, a 9 year-old Vermont boy started the 'Be Straw Free' movement. Since then he has been around the world encouraging other states and countries to act and be part of the Be Straw Free movement. In addition, the Ocean Conservancy has created a successful 'Skip the Straw' drive.

So what does this have to do with the Rogue Valley? We no longer have the Plastic Round Up so you know the landfill is running over with single-use plastics. We can ask our favorite restaurants to stop giving straws automatically. We can request 'no straw

please' when we purchase our beverage of choice, whether it be an iced coffee, a Coke or a Manhattan. There are metal and glass straws that come with designs and colors that can be purchased for repeated use if you must use a straw.

I no longer play with paper dolls, the four-poster has long gone, and I get few colds, but I still like the sensation of a cold liquid entering my mouth through my glass straw and I like being part of a Straws Upon Request campaign, reducing my contribution to the landfill. Some of our local restaurants already have a Water Upon Request policy (like the Wild Goose). Ashland should have a Straw Upon Request policy-and then offer biodegradable paper straws. The Mayor and City Council should join the national Skip the Straw Day and have the City initiate measures to eliminate the plastic straw as they did with the plastic bag ban.