

## ***Students report losing EcoMugs***

By Michael Johnson

*EcoMugs are distributed free of charge to incoming first-year students by the Office for Sustainability; however, many students lose the EcoMug before they graduate.*

Congratulations! You have been accepted to Western Michigan University, and it's the last day of "Welcome Week." You have collected many free items from different organizations to help you as you in your journey through college, but one of those items helps you in a different way.

The [EcoMug](#) from the Office for Sustainability, holds beverages and limits the use of plastic containers around campus. The EcoMug is made from a material that won't break down when filled with hot and cold liquids, said Carolyn Noack, manager of waste reduction services for Office for Sustainability at WMU. Since 2009 over 20,000 EcoMugs have been distributed to students, Noack said. The number of EcoMugs given out each year varies from about 4,000 to 6,000, depending on how many students, faculty and staff come to the office to get one, she said.

"The EcoMug is something that students can use to carry water or anything they want," Noack said "The EcoMug is a sturdy mug; it won't break easily and is something students can depend on throughout their years here and after. It is the only mug that is allowed in the cafes around campus. They are also lightweight but big enough to hold enough liquid to satisfy one serving -- about eight ounces or one cup," she said.

However, the truth behind the story of the EcoMug is many students lose the EcoMug before they graduate from WMU. If you lose it, a replacement costs \$7 for an EcoMug and \$5 for an EcoJug.

Patrick Smith, a sophomore majoring in criminal justice at WMU, said he lost his EcoMug at the beginning of his first year.

"I got it and then like maybe a month later I actually tried to use it," Smith said. "I carried it around with me for like a week, then I think I just put it down and it was gone."

Noack said the most common reason EcoMugs are lost is from students forgetting where they put the mug or setting it down and forgetting to pick it back up.

"A simple way to stop that is to put your name on the slot that has your name," Noack said. "You'd be surprised how many times it would come back to you."

Britnee Jefferies is a sophomore majoring in social work at WMU who said she lost her EcoMug at the beginning of the second semester of her sophomore year.

"I said I wouldn't lose it. I used it my whole freshman year and in the summer. I took it home and never misplaced it. I even have my name on it," Jefferies said. "I remember I was running late for my next class and left it in the class I was leaving, came back and it was gone."

Some students who lose their mugs may be victims of theft from other students, although the theft may be unintentional, Noack said.

"Some students tell me how they find them just sitting around and pick them up because they lost theirs or something happened to theirs," Noack said. "They don't mean to take someone else's, but if one is just lying around for a while it's better to use it then for it to be thrown away."

Giovanna Johnson is a junior majoring in communication at WMU, and she said she has not lost her EcoMug.

“I take care of it. I use the clip to put it on my backpack. I got my name on it, and I use it so much that I am always sure that I have it,” said Johnson. “I haven’t lost it yet, and I don’t plan on it. I take care of my things.”

Noack said the EcoMug can also help students economically.

“If students use the EcoMug then they won’t have to go out and buy drinks in plastic bottles, they can reuse the EcoMug and clean it and reuse it. The EcoMug can replace students need to buy water or drinks offered in the dining halls around campus,” Noack said. Every dining hall on campus accepts the EcoMug. This includes cafes off main campus located in the Health and Human Services campus, and the Parkview campus.

The EcoMug isn’t cheap to distribute, Noack said. The EcoMug initiative costs around \$25,000 each year to make the EcoMug and now the new EcoJug. The EcoJug is basically the same container as the EcoMug but is a little bit smaller and has a carry clip attached to the lid of the jug to clip onto a belt or backpack.

“It costs roughly \$25,000 and most of that is covered by our sponsor Consumers Credit Union, but it’s still expensive to make them for them to just get lost or thrown away,” Noack said.

The Office for Sustainability’s online student survey has uncovered a variety of reasons why students don’t use their EcoMugs. Some students reported that they just misplaced it or threw it away because it was dirty, too small, did not look cool or because they thought that the lid was weird. Others reported that they forgot about it and didn’t use it any more.

Noack said one reason for the EcoMug initiative is to encourage students to be more sustainable.

“The purpose for having them is to get students to make better sustainability choices,” Noack said. “We try to encourage students not to use disposable bottles and use the EcoMug. Tap water is good and won’t kill you, trust me.”

Noack said the Office for Sustainability sees the EcoMug initiative as the first step in helping students become part of the WeSustain belief at WMU and to get students to become more sustainable in their daily lives.