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ALL BLOGS

Guilt at 35,000 Feet

— By [Julia Whitty](#) | Mon March 16, 2009 4:53 PM PST



—Julia Whitty

[counterproductive](#). Can't we just wash some dishes?

Artist [Chris Jordan](#) claims with his usual punch-in-the-gut [visual impact](#) that the airline industry in the US uses 1 million plastic cups every six hours. Not sure where he got that number but my flight alone must have squandered something like 4,000 cups.

The problem bugs me on the ground too. So here's my solution. I call it my Urban Mess Kit. It's composed of a cool [Float messenger bag](#) from Osprey made of PET plastics with a minimum of 70-percent recycled materials, mostly recycled drink bottles. I throw in two polypropylene doggy-bag containers that came with my Chinese restaurant leftovers. They're designed for one-time-only use but in reality they'll likely outlive me. I add two sets of plastic cutlery picked up from to-go meals and then NOT thrown away. Finally, one Nalgene drink bottle that I use for hot and cold drinks.

Okay, [Nalgene](#) isn't perfect. This older bottle I have probably isn't even BPA-free like the newer stuff. It's definitely not trendy like stainless. But it's overwhelming advantage, IMO, is that I bought it used from a thrift store & so did not encourage the creation of any more plastic to clog the arteries of Planet Earth.

I use my Urban Mess Kit for most everything these days: drinks bought on the go (I hand over my bottle); food bought on the go (including deli counters); leftovers; impromptu picnics. Plus there's still room in my Osprey pack for my laptop, wallet, glasses, keys, phone, a book and more. It all nests into a small footprint, pun intended. If I was entrepreneurial, I'd build and sell these kits. But it would be friendlier to the environment if you reused some of the disposable stuff coming your way and made your own.

Oh, and as part of its [Triple-R program](#) for US customers, Osprey joins with the [Mountain Fund](#) to take back your old (still useable) pack and give it to someone somewhere in the world who needs it: women trying to break into the trekking and climbing industries in Nepal & Uganda; kids in orphanages in Kyrgyzstan who can learn to socialize on treks; city kids who need to see wilderness. In return, they'll give you 10 percent off a new Osprey bag. So if you *really* need a new bag, this is a good way to mitigate some of your consumption.

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A picture is worth 1,000 words. Chris Jordan's photo illustrations are worth 200,000 cigarette packs, 170,000 disposable batteries, eight million toothpicks, two million plastic beverage bottles, and 426,000 discarded cell phones. (Not that you can tell from the tiny reproduction, but the image accompanying this item contains 29,569 handguns.) In his humbling exhibit titled "Running the Numbers, An American Self-Portrait" the accomplished Seattle-based...

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