

Arthur D. Little emerged with the following results:

**Life-Cycle Analysis of Disposable and Reusable Diapers**  
(based on weekly diaper needs)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Disposable</u>	<u>Reusable</u>
Raw Materials Consumption (lbs)	25.30	3.60
Energy Consumption (Btu)	23,290.00	78,890.00
Water Consumption (gal)	23.60	144.00
Atmospheric Emissions (lbs)	0.09	0.86
Waste Water Effluents (lbs)	0.01	0.12
Process Solid Waste (lbs)	2.02	3.13
Post-Consumer Waste	22.18	0.24
Total Costs (\$/week)	10.31	7.47-16.92

***Questions:***

1. Put yourself in the position of the leader of the Arthur D. Little project team that must recommend one type of diaper over the other. Are all of your assumptions correct? Which diaper would you recommend, based on the data?
2. In addition to the environmental information, the study also included an analysis of both the health and the economic implications of each diaper type.
  - *Health:* Disposables were found to cause, on average, less incidence of diaper rash (caused by contact between skin and urine) than reusables.
  - *Economic:* To calculate the cost to the consumer of using each type of diaper, the research team had to make some assumptions about the cost of washing reusable diapers. It found that when home labor was valued at the minimum wage or higher, disposable diapers were cheaper to use than reusables.

Are the assumptions regarding diaper economics correct? Do the health and economic data change or influence your decision? Should they?

3. Put yourself in the position of the vice president of the diaper division at P&G. P&G was recently rated the most “environmentally conscious” company in an *Advertising Age* survey and yet, the state of Vermont has proposed a ban on disposable diapers. What, if any, action should you take?

***References:***

Arthur D. Little, Inc., *Disposable versus Reusable Diapers: Health, Environmental, and Economic Comparisons*, report to Procter and Gamble, March 16, 1990.

Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry and SETAC Foundation for Environmental Education, *A Technical Framework for Life-Cycle Assessment*, Workshop Report, January 1991, p. xvii.

David Stipp, “Life-Cycle Analysis Measures Greenness, But Results May Not Be Black and White,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 28, 1991.

### An Example Lifecycle Assessment: Polystyrene Cups

As an example of the value (and difficulty) of performing a complete lifecycle assessment, consider a comparison of the environmental impacts of single-use, 8-ounce, hot-drink containers made from polystyrene foam with similar cups made from uncoated paper (Hocking, 1991). As shown in Table 6, the raw materials inputs for the two types of cups are very different. A paper cup requires about 21 g of wood and bark plus 1.2 g of chemicals to produce an 8.2-g cup, while a 1.9-g polystyrene

TABLE 6

<b>Life-Cycle Assessment for Single-Use, Hot-Drink Cups (per 1,000 Cups)</b>		
	8.3 g Paper Cup	1.9 g Polyfoam Cup
<i>Raw Materials</i>		
Wood and bark (kg)	21	0
Petroleum feedstock (kg oil)	0	2.4
Other chemicals (kg)	1.2	0.08
<i>Purchased Energy</i>		
Process heat (kg oil)	1.8	1.9
Electricity (kg oil) <sup>a</sup>	2	0.15
<i>Water Effluent</i>		
Volume (m <sup>3</sup> )	1	0.05
Suspended solids (g)	80	1
BOD (g)	90	0.4
Organochlorines (g)	20	0
Inorganic salts (g)	500	30
Fiber (g)	10	0
<i>Air Emissions</i>		
Chlorine (g)	2	0
Chlorine dioxide (g)	2	0
Reduced sulfides (g)	10	0
Particulates (g)	20	0.8
Carbon monoxide (g)	30	0.2
Nitrogen oxides (g)	50	0.8
Sulfur dioxide (g)	100	7
Pentane (g)	0	80
Ethylbenzene, styrene (g)	0	5
<i>Recycle/Reuse Potential</i>		
Reuse	Possible	Easy
Recycle	Acceptable	Good
<i>Ultimate Disposal</i>		
Proper incineration	Clean	Clean
Heat recovery (MJ)	170	80
Mass to landfill (kg)	8.3	1.9
Volume in landfill (m <sup>3</sup> )	0.0175	0.0178
Biodegradability (landfill)	Yes	No

<sup>a</sup>Calculated using 33-percent efficient power plant burning residual fuel oil.

Source: Based on data in Hocking, 1991.