

Consumers giving up plastic for glass

By Stephanie Strom, New York Times

Glass water bottles, so yesterday. Plastic, so convenient; metal, so hip.

But now, in back to the future fashion, glass is making a bit of a comeback. And it is being helped in a small way by an entrepreneur who is developing a reusable glass bottle that is hard to break and will not shatter if broken.

The shift to reusable glass water bottles from plastic and metal, which began taking off a couple of years ago, is becoming big business, retailers said.

"I'd say glass bottles account for 20 percent, 30 percent of water bottle sales on our site now," said Vincent Cobb, founder of reuseit.com, which sells a variety of reusable products. "More and more people are looking for glass."

The interest does not stop at water bottles.

Consumer concerns that chemicals used in packaging can leach into the products they eat and drink are driving more and more beverage makers and food producers to use glass containers, said Lynn Bragg, president of the Glass Packaging Institute, an industry association. "They're also looking for sustainable products to be ecologically responsible."

Coca-Cola is expanding the distribution of products — Coca-Cola, Diet Coke, Coke Zero and Sprite — that it sells in 8-ounce glass bottles, and S.C. Johnson now sells a line of reusable Ziploc containers called VersaGlass that can be used in a microwave, a freezer and, without their lids, even in an oven up to 400 degrees.

“It’s part of our overall effort to increase packaging diversity so that people have more choices of packaging and portion size,” said Susan Stribling, a Coca-Cola spokeswoman.

No one expects glass to replace plastic anytime soon. After all, billions of plastic bottles are used every year. But in a survey of more than 4,000 consumers this year by EcoFocus Worldwide, a research and consulting group, 37 percent said they were extremely or very concerned about the health and safety of plastics used in food and water packaging, compared to 33 percent in 2010.

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