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What's the deal with 'half-ply'? MHC's plumbing mystery solved

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IEWS: 63



It's something of a sensitive issue. The problem is the tissue – the individually-wrapped rolls of one-ply toilet paper manufactured by Florida-based company Atlas, less affectionately referred to as 'half-ply' by some students.

Common complaints are that it's too thin to adequately clean oneself with, that it doesn't tear easily enough and leaves a papery mess, that it's translucent and that it's simply not comfortable to use. "If I can't get it out of the roll, then we have a problem," said Erika Van Andel '16. "That's its biggest flaw."

Students also believe that because the tissue is weaker, they end up using more of it than they would a thicker paper. Celestella Webster '18 complained, "You have to waste more because you have to take more off to finish the job, so it's not very efficient."

Mount Holyoke's plumbing supervisor John Donah understands where student's frustration comes from, but his hands are tied. "There's probably the perception out there that we're doing it because of cost, but there's a lot of factors," said Donah.

Since 1994, federal law has mandated that all newly installed toilets use 1.6 gallons of water per flush. With about 80 percent of the 698 toilets on campus being low-flow, combined with older pipes snaking their way underground, the system can't handle the plush two-ply students dream about.

Ten years ago they attempted to switch to a higher-quality paper, but with undesirable results. "Because we knew no one really liked the paper, we switched to two-ply," said Gary Laverdiere, the stockroom supervisor for facilities management. "We used just as much paper. When people roll off a certain amount, it doesn't matter how thick it is."

Along with costing more money and wasting more product, switching to better paper ended up causing a score of plumbing issues as well.

"We were getting bombarded with sewer problems and toilet problems," said Donah. "It was just a nightmare." After a few months using embossed two-ply, the decision was made to switch back to one-ply to save money and resources.

Following the mess of trying to upgrade, the plumbing department experimented with three toilet papers. One two-ply and two one-plys were tested for their ability to break down in sewage, and they settled upon the current paper. "I don't know what it is about this paper," said Laverdiere. "For some reason it breaks down really nicely."

On average, the school spends \$38,100 across 1,200 cases of toilet paper annually, and Laverdiere said he orders "a tractor trailer full" of the stuff twice a year. The majority of the toilet paper is used during the school year, and the rest during the summer.

Although it may not be the most comfortable paper, it is environmentally friendly. Atlas touts the Green Heritage toilet paper used at Mount Holyoke as being made of 100 percent recovered paper fiber, meaning it is derived from products such as used office paper and newspaper that have reached the end of their life. For some students, its ecological impact outweighs how comfortable – or uncomfortable – it is.

"The fact that the toilet paper we use is recycled is more important to me than having two-ply," said environmental studies major Sarah Tobias '17.

Others believe that there has to be some middle ground between comfort and price. As Katherine Cirincione '16 said, "It doesn't need to be really expensive, but two-ply would be nice."

Unpopular as it is, it won't be going anywhere but down the toilet anytime soon. Until an ecologically safe, budget-friendly and easily degradable two-ply is found students will continue to suffer.

Despite the bad reputation it has on campus, the paper has a four-star rating on Amazon.

"Seems like most of America likes to coddle their unmentionable regions," raved reviewer M. Logix, who noted that they use the paper because their plumber recommended it. "It isn't the most comfortable or soft on your tushy but it lasts a long time per roll, and every time I use it I think 'ahh my septic tank will thank me.'"

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 Author: **Alicia Winokur**

1 COMMENT

 **Bowie**
February 26, 2016
9:07 pm

Thanks for bringing this issue to light – I've wanted to know why the 1-ply for the longest time! I also support the environmental aspect of using it, knowing now that people use as much 2-ply as 1-ply ☐

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"Fefu and her Friends" is happening in Rooke Theatre. The play features Molly Paige FP '18 as Fefu, along with Fatima Cadet-Diaby '16 (Paula), Jack Clancy '17 (Sue), Julia Cole '19 (Julia), Talia Gonzales '18 (Cindy), Zoe Rand '16 (Cecelia), Maria Signorelli '17 (Christina) and Robyn Sutton-Fernandez FP '17 (Emma). Read more about the production before watching it live.

CAMPUS HAPPENINGS



Second Snow Day 2015. Photo by Sophie Santis '16

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