



2. Reduce the Use of Plastics On Campus

There is a need for more deliberate action to reduce the use of plastic and decrease the amount of plastic that is being dumped in landfills or ending up in the environment. Many people are in the habit of selecting single-use packages and bottles instead of consistently thinking about reusable alternatives and smarter purchases.

Easy Ways to Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle to minimize plastic pollution - Explore individual solutions for students, faculty and staff

- ▶ Carry your own reusable drink container with you to use for coffee, water, and other beverages. Check with your favorite food providers on campus and find out if there are any restrictions to using reusable containers. You can also bring reusable food containers for your food or leftovers instead of taking the plastic or polystyrene containers often provided. Again, check with food providers on any restrictions.
- ▶ Say no to the straw or bring your own reusable straw. You will need to use a bottle brush to clean your reusable straw efficiently.
- ▶ When purchasing items, put them in your backpack instead of getting an extra plastic bag or carry an extra reusable bag with you.

- ▶ When grocery shopping, choose items packaged in aluminum or cardboard rather than plastic, if possible. Put your fruits and vegetables directly in the cart or bring your own reusable bag to use instead of the individual plastic bags typically used for fruits and vegetables. Purchase in bulk, when possible, and use reusable food containers to take enough for a snack or if you need to freeze anything. Individually wrapped snacks and other items are convenient, however they increase the amount of plastic that will go to the landfill; this type of plastic is often difficult to recycle.

CARDBOARD is easily recyclable and also degrades more quickly if it ends up in the landfill. And nearly 75 percent of all aluminum produced in the United States is still in use today, and aluminum can be recycled over and over again.²⁶

- ▶ Consider donating items before discarding them in the trash. Can they still be of use to you or to someone else? If something is broken find out if you can fix it before you discard it. YouTube videos can be a wonderful source for DIY projects.
- ▶ Recycle plastic items when possible. Be sure to read the bin signs carefully to ensure you are placing the plastic material in the proper place. If you are unable to find a recycling bin nearby, bring it home with you.
- ▶ Spread the word! Tell your friends, family and professors to be conscious of their plastic consumption.



National Wildlife Federation's online [EcoLeaders community](#) of 3,000 young conservation leaders features a project planning tool to allow leaders to share goals, updates, photos and videos. EcoLeaders also hosts a comprehensive [project planning resource library](#) with resources to help plan, implement, and communicate about campus sustainability projects. Resources include project management templates, volunteer recruitment tips, budget development guidance, press release templates, and more. Faculty and staff are also welcome to join.

EXPLORE

CAMPUS-WIDE SOLUTIONS

Before you embark on your campus adventure to address plastic pollution, key partners to keep in mind are the sustainability, facilities, operations, and purchasing departments on campus, as well as student government and clubs.

► Host a waste audit to identify the biggest culprit of plastic waste on campus.

Hosting a Dumpster Dive (AKA a Waste Audit) will help answer the following questions: What items are being thrown out the most? How many recyclable items are being discarded in the trash instead of being recycled? Check out [RecycleMania's Dumpster Dive Activity Guide](#) to get started.

- Partner with the sustainability, facilities, or operations departments on this effort.
- Choose dumpsters that service different types of buildings on campus – food, residence halls, science buildings, academic offices, etc. to get a complete picture of waste on campus and the biggest culprit of plastic from the different buildings.
- Work with your campus partners (sustainability/facilities/operations) to ensure you and your volunteers have proper supplies and gear for safety, i.e., gloves, cover-ups for your clothes, drop cloths for sorting trash, etc.

There are several waste audit guides available:

- Rubicon – [Waste Audit Guide](#)
- Post-Landfill Action Network -[Waste Audit Manual](#)
- Busch Systems – [Conducting a Recycling and Waste Audit](#)

Campus Examples:

- Check out [Union College's waste audit video](#).
- [How to Perform a University Waste Audit](#) – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- [Washington University in St. Louis](#) – Waste Audit Report

► Interview campus stakeholders to learn more about the purchasing, use, and disposing of plastic products and materials on campus.

Reach out to staff in diverse departments on campus to set up times to talk. By learning about the functions of the various departments on campus, you will learn about what is being purchased and what is being discarded and can explore alternative options to reduce the use of plastics on campus and increase the recycling.



Pacific Lutheran University

Departments to connect with could include the following:

- Purchasing
- Science buildings
- Facilities and operations
- Bookstore
- Dining services

Recommended questions could include:

- Is there an opportunity to replace the single-use plastic items with reusable items? If yes, research the costs and benefits of purchasing reusable items instead of single-use plastic items. Does it cost less to invest in reusable items instead of purchasing single-use items on a regular basis? If the cost is more, do the other benefits outweigh the additional cost? For example, environmental benefits, cost associated with pick-up of this waste, etc.
- Is there an opportunity to purchase items made of pre or post-consumer recycled content?
- What type of waste is associated with the products that come into the department?
- How are plastics and plastic waste associated with purchased campus products being disposed of? If recycled, do you know what its second use is?
- If the plastic waste is not currently being recycled, check with your sustainability/facilities/operations departments to coordinate with the campus's current recycling hauler to see if this type of plastic can be recycled. Consider [Terracycle](#) as an option, they offer free recycling programs funded by brands, manufacturers, and retailers around the world to help collect and recycle your hard-to-recycle waste.
- Find out if there is an associated cost and additional staff time required to prepare the waste to be shipped to or picked up by a recycler. Are there funds available to cover this? If not, identify your next steps. Who should you meet with on campus to secure the additional funds – the head of facilities and operations, purchasing, the president? Are there local businesses or grant opportunities to secure additional funding from the county, city, or state government?

To lead [George Mason University](#) in Virginia to its carbon neutrality goals, Mason's Office of Sustainability (OoS) has collaborated with departments across campus to 'green' their procurement strategy. The OoS encourages partners to buy less, buy durable, and buy carbon neutral products that promote green behavior. In just the past year, this source-side approach to reducing single-use plastics has included investments from Mason's Housing & Residence Life to replace unsustainable student move-in giveaways with reusable metal tumblers, for use at Mason's numerous water re-fill stations, and reusable bags. Additionally, in Spring 2020, the OoS partnered with Mason Athletics to give away 1,000 ChicoBags – instead of 2,000-3,000 t-shirts, etc. – at the annual zero-waste green game, part of RecycleMania's GameDay Basketball competition. Not only are these investments reducing the university's footprint, they support a green lifestyle potentially replacing over 1,400 plastic shopping bags each!



► **Set a Benchmark through Participation in the Campus Race to Zero Waste Competition.**



The [Campus Race to Zero Waste](#) (formerly known as [RecycleMania](#)) competition takes place during 8 weeks in the spring (February through March) and helps campuses reduce their waste and increase recycling through tracking, reporting, activities, and education. Campuses track and report on trash, food-waste organics, and recycling

each week for eight weeks; there are also special-category opportunities including electronics, basketball games, and zero waste. There is a category for campuses just getting started and for those that are advanced in their zero-waste efforts. The competition gives campuses the opportunity to focus their outreach, engagement and educational activities and set a benchmark during an 8-week time frame to determine what strategies are most effective and should be implemented long-term. The competition also gives students the opportunity to gain leadership skills in project management, communications, and problem-solving, for example, and to learn more about the different stakeholders on campus. Registration for the competition opens in early September each year. In 2019, campuses recycled and composted 69.5 million pounds of



Florida A&M University

waste and cut out 300 million single-use plastics containers from the waste stream. Since 2001, the program has engaged more than 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. In spring 2020, RecycleMania began transitioning to its new name, Campus Race to Zero Waste, to better reflect and reinforce the purpose of the program – to help colleges and universities find pathways toward zero waste.

► **Distribute reusable food and drink containers to students, faculty and staff.**

- Partner with housing and residence life, dining facilities, campus activities, the campus bookstore, or other campus departments on this effort.
- Talk with campus food vendors to learn about any rules and restrictions associated with using reusable containers.
- Launch a communications campaign in conjunction with the distribution of reusable items to help students, faculty, and staff find out key details such as where to pick up free items, why is it important to use reusable items, and more.
- Host a pledge campaign to gain commitments from students, faculty, and staff to use reusable drink and/or food containers.
- Install water bottle-refill stations on campus to ensure easy use of refillable drink containers.
- Freshmen orientation is a great opportunity for distribution of reusable items. It's an opportunity to educate incoming students on what it means to be part of a sustainable campus, including how they can reduce their waste footprint and recycle responsibly.

- Need money? Sources of funding to support the purchase of reusable items might include the following campus departments: admissions, freshmen centers, campus activities, housing, or the president's office. You could also reach out to community partners for donations of money or items or even reach out to larger companies that sell the reusable products you are interested in and see if they would be willing to donate items.

The [University of Nevada Las Vegas's](#) Rebels Are Refilling campaign uses Cupanion's [Fill It Forward](#) app to encourage students and staff to use reusable bottles and mugs.

Individuals simply place a scannable sticker on their reusable container and scan it each time they use one of UNLV's over 100 hydration stations on campus. Each time a sticker is scanned, Cupanion gives clean water to a person in need. UNLV's effort is managed by a student intern studying public health, and is supported by the Nevada Regent Service Award program.



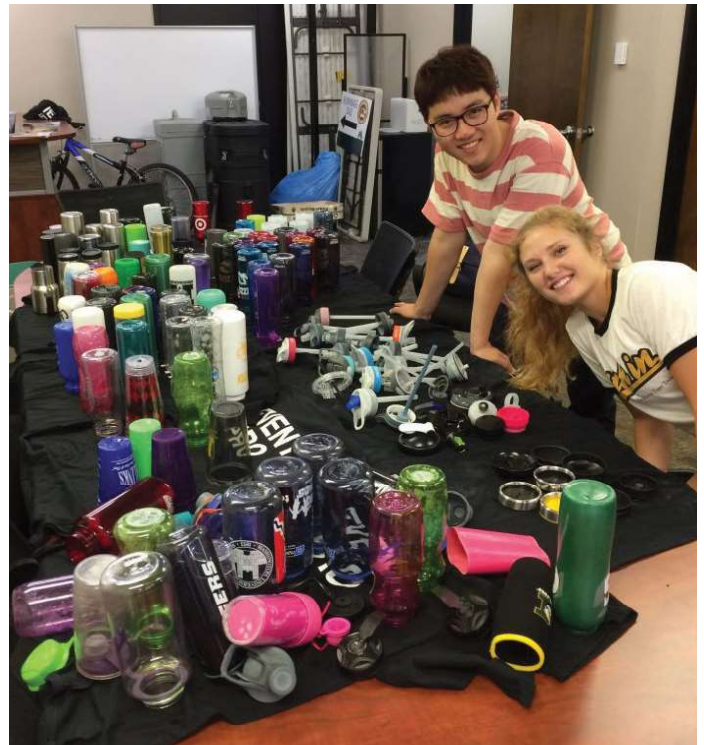
Also in partnership with Cupanion, the [University of Florida](#)²⁷ rewards UF students, faculty, and staff for using and refilling reusable bottles or thermoses on campus. Users can scan their reusable bottles with Cupanion's Fill it Forward mobile app every time they refill. The app's interactive display allows users to track their environmental impact as well as the cumulative impact at UF. With each scan, users also earn points that can be redeemed for entries into monthly drawings for featured rewards, which are often donated from campus and community partners. In October 2018, UF was awarded the



University of Florida

Groundbreaker Award from Cupanion, signifying that the campus as a whole had diverted more than 10,000 single-use bottles through the Fill It Forward program. Since then, UF's impact has more than doubled, with over 21,800 total reuses tracked through the app. The program continues to grow in audience and engagement, with new partnerships and campaigns every month.

The [University of Missouri's](#)²⁸ Sustainability Office works hard to encourage the reduction of disposable plastic water bottles by distributing reusable water bottles. The sustainability office accepts donations from the campus community as well as MU lost-and-found stations after water bottles have gone unclaimed for more than 60 to 90 days. In partnership with MU Campus Dining Services, they run the reusable bottles through their industrial-sized dishwashers, making sure each bottle is properly sanitized. From there the clean, spiffy water bottles are given to students at all of the MU Sustainability events.



University of Missouri

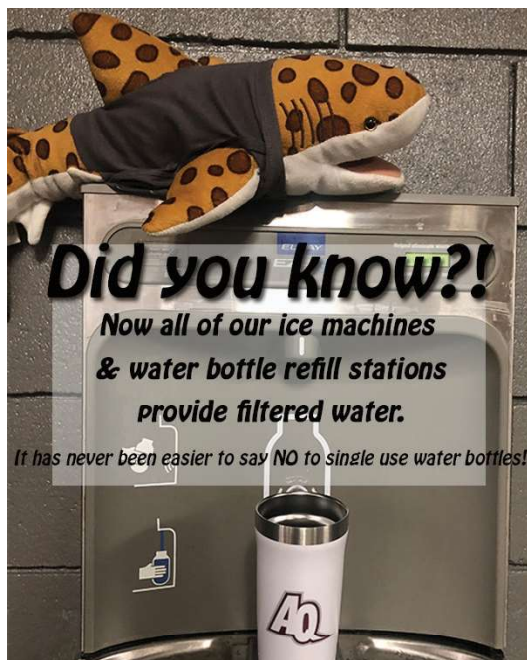
“Students are really receptive of seeing free water bottles at our events, which in turn allows us to educate them on why we provide such a service in the first place: to lower consumption and reduce plastic pollution,” said MU Sustainability Programs Assistant Ashley Craft. “It’s great to see more and more students using a reusable bottle across campus. Often times, students will even stop back by with a friend so that they can grab a water bottle, helping us spread the message even further.”

Is your campus community concerned about drinking tap water instead of bottled water?

[Bard College](#)²⁹ in New York hosts a tap-water tasting effort on campus. In spring 2019, Bard tabled in the Campus Center and provided three water coolers – one filled with water from the tap, one filled with filtered water, and the third cooler is store-bought water from a bottle. Students taste tested each of the three types of water and voted for which one tastes the best. Results? Of all the students who participated, 44.4 percent preferred tap water, 29.6 percent preferred bottled water, and 25.9 percent voted for filtered water.

In addition to hosting a taste test, you can launch a campus survey to find out how many students, faculty, and staff choose bottled water over tap water. The results might indicate the need for an educational awareness campaign to remind people about the benefits of tap water. For example, the [Safe Drinking Water Act](#) does not apply to bottled water, and bottled water is not regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Check out [Food & Water Watch](#); they work with students at colleges and universities across the United States to promote tap water and to ban bottled water on their campuses. Connect with your campus operations department to better understand the campus' water distribution systems and the safety of drinking tap water on campus in order to address any concerns about switching from bottled water to tap water; they can also provide information for the educational awareness campaign.

Tap water quality is a common concern in Michigan, and often leads students and other community members to purchase bottled water out of caution. [Aquinas College](#) is doing their part to promote the use of their water bottle refill station infrastructure and other campus tap water options that have additional filtration for peace of mind. Additionally, Aquinas is educating the campus community about ocean plastics and its impact on shark populations.



Aquinas College



► Launch an educational awareness campaign. Here are a few ideas:

[California State University Northridge's \(CSUN\) Associated Students Sustainability & Recycling group](#)³⁰ developed an 8-week plan to test out education and engagement strategies, including notebook recycling, a BYOB campaign (bring your own water bottle instead of a single-use water bottle), and a straw swap that targeted the on-campus farmers' market, where many vendors give out single-use straws (reusable stainless steel and silicone straws were provided in exchange). In order to get participation in the bottle swap or straw swap, CSUN set up "Trash Talkers" waste-sorting tables at major food areas around campus to help educate students and staff about which bin to use for recyclable and landfill items. Trash Talkers has grown and become an integral part of the educational programming for campus sustainability. CSUN emphasizes that the type of "swag" given out should be more than a throwaway item. They focused on reusable straws and bottles because, although they might be more expensive than cheaper giveaways such as pens or paper products, their repeated use will hopefully be able to reduce waste overall.



Rider University

[Rider University](#)³¹ in New Jersey takes every advantage each year to distribute mugs and water bottles to students, faculty and staff in order to reduce single-use plastic bottles on campus. Students are encouraged to take a pledge to refill and reuse instead of opting for single-use, disposable drink-ware, and then “mug-shots” are shared via campus social-media channels.

Use the [Mug Shots](#) activity to promote the use of reusable mugs as a normative behavior for students and staff to emulate. To do this, take photographs of people holding their reusable mug and post them on flyers with a “mug shot” title around campus, on bulletin boards, online, and on social media outlets. As part of this campaign, educate the campus community on the benefits of using reusable items and highlight the harmful impacts of plastics on humans and wildlife. Be sure to communicate with your audience through diverse strategies including in-person events and online via email, social media, campus websites, etc.

Use the [Caught Green-Handed](#) activity to encourage recycling and the use of reusable items by rewarding students caught “green-handed.” A team of spotters will wait near recycling bins, water fountains, refilling stations, or in the dining hall to recognize people “caught” in the act of recycling and reducing waste. This is a great way for a Resident Advisor (RA) to connect with students in a dorm or a green team or sustainability office to engage the community.



Lehigh University

[Lehigh University](#) in Pennsylvania is actively trying to tackle plastic pollution on campus through a number of initiatives, including:

- Offering discounts across campus for students, faculty, staff, and visitors who use a reusable mug and installing water-bottle refill stations throughout campus to encourage the use of reusable bottles.
- Eliminating plastic bags at all Lehigh dining locations and plastic straws across campus.
- Encouraging the use of reusable eco-containers for carry-out meals at select Lehigh dining locations.

► **Save Your Campus Mascot** – Is your campus mascot impacted by plastic pollution, or is it listed as [endangered](#) or [threatened](#)³²? Host an awareness campaign on campus to educate students, faculty and staff about the impacts on your wildlife mascot and highlight actions to take to help protect the species. You can also choose a plant or animal species in your community that is being impacted by plastic pollution on land, in a river, or in the ocean.

[RecycleMania’s Activity Guide for Freshmen, Dorm Dwellers and Student Leaders](#) has great ideas and resources to engage students on campus.



► **Engage your dorm dwellers.**

Focus your outreach and activities in a residence hall or in multiple dorms.

- Host a waste audit for one or more dorms. Check out the “Host a waste audit to identify the biggest culprit of plastic waste on campus” section above for tips.
- Participate in [RecycleMania’s Race to Zero](#) Waste Building competition and choose a dorm.

- Host a dorm exchange where students exchange a single-use plastic items (cup or plastic bag, for example) for a reusable item. Or ask students to donate extra school supplies or unwanted clothes for local charity donation, and in exchange they will receive a reusable item.
- Host a [dorm contest](#) between floors or multiple buildings. Find out which dorm can reduce the most plastics by choosing reusable over single-use items or by giving up straws or the use of plastic bags, for example. Or host a contest on which dorm team can create the most creative posters to encourage plastic reduction on campus.



University of North Texas

► **Host a campus or community cleanup to remove plastic and other trash from the environment.**

*During the 2018 International Coastal Cleanup, 1,754,908 plastic beverage bottles and 3,668,871 straws and stirrers were collected.*³³

Regular cleanups are necessary to ensure the campus environment stays clean, healthy, and safe for students, faculty, staff, and the wildlife that call the campus home. Cleanups give students and staff the opportunity to get to know each other and get outdoors and enjoy the day. Regular cleanups are important because, when it rains, storm sewers, sewer overflows, and drainage outflows transport litter to rivers, which eventually carry plastic and other trash into lakes, rivers, and oceans, so it's important to get the trash before it goes too far.

- Choose a space on campus or in the community that has a larger amount of trash than others and host a cleanup (garden, forest, path, pond, etc.). Interested in a fall clean-up? Join the Ocean Conservancy's [International Coastal Cleanup](#)³⁴ to learn more.

- Work with campus facilities or landscaping departments to let them know that you want to host a cleanup and coordinate on location, supplies (trash bags, gloves, brightly colored safety vests), any hazards to be aware of, etc. Be sure to have two colors of trash bags: one for trash and one for recyclables.
- Other campus partners on this effort could include the sustainability office, housing and residence life, campus activities, or student life. If you choose to do a community cleanup, possible partners could include churches, k-12 schools, and community centers.
- Recruit student, faculty, staff, and community volunteers to help with the cleanup. Perhaps a campus department or community partner would donate snacks and drinks for volunteers.
- Highlight opportunities via the campus and local newspapers and social media sites and be sure to take photos. Educate the community on why you are hosting a cleanup and provide ways to get involved.

Join the Wave!

Get Involved in the International Coastal Cleanup in September

Since 1986 the Ocean Conservancy has been working with partners around the world to organize the International Coastal Cleanup. The Cleanup has engaged over 15 million people since its inception, removing over 300 million pounds of trash from the world's beaches and waterways.

Every September, hundreds of thousands of volunteers participate and learn about the impacts of marine debris. The data collected by volunteers are used by NGOs, policy makers, educators and industry innovators to engage the public, craft policies and inform solutions to reduce marine debris. Volunteers are encouraged to collect trash and recyclable materials in separate bags to be disposed of properly.

Cleanups can take place on shorelines, rivers, lakes, and inland and can be on foot, on watercraft and even underwater with scuba divers! The Cleanup is also a great opportunity to get outdoors and encourage freshmen and other students to take environmental action early in the fall semester! [Learn more.](#)

National Wildlife Federation and RecycleMania are proud partners of the International Coastal Cleanup.



► **Help pass a campus policy addressing plastics on campus.**

Campus policies provide guidance and clear actions to ensure that you working toward your goals and desired outcomes. Implementing policies on campus that address the use of plastics can also help educate the campus community and aims to ensure consistency across the campus.

- Find out if your campus has any current policies addressing plastic materials. Inquire with the sustainability or purchasing departments. If there are none, find out how you can help move this effort forward. Host an advocacy campaign to gain the support of students, faculty, staff, and administrators. See campus examples below to get ideas.
- If a campus policy exists, how many students, faculty, and staff know about it? Is there an education and awareness opportunity here?

Launch an educational awareness campaign. Share information via campus newspapers, social media channels, websites, on-campus poster, etc. Highlight the details of the policy and explain why it's important and how it impacts students, faculty, and staff. Consider engaging the local community in your awareness campaign. This may lead to discussions and changes to reduce plastics in your city or state.

Check out the campus examples featuring:

- Bottled Water Bans
- Plastic-Straw Bans
- Plastic-Bag Bans
- Polystyrene (Styrofoam) Bans

Bottled Water Bans

After millions of barrels of oil are used to produce and ship plastic water bottles, 75 percent of them land in the garbage or our waterways instead of the recycle bin. (Food and Water Watch)³⁵

Washington University in St. Louis³⁶ in Missouri became the first North American university to ban the sale of bottled water on its West, North, and Danforth campuses in 2009. Since the ban went into effect, the sale of all bottled beverages has decreased by nearly 40 percent, a reduction of over 567,000 plastic bottles annually. The campus also features water fountains that have fixtures that make refilling reusable water bottles fast and easy.

Macalester College³⁷ in Minnesota adopted its bottled-water policy in 2011, eliminating the sale and provision of bottled water on campus.

The policy states “The elimination of plain, individual container bottled water on campus includes:



- The sale of bottled water in the Highlander Store, Grille, and Scotties;
- The sale of bottled water by Catering and at athletic concessions;
- The inclusion in meal pack-outs for groups or individuals;
- The sale of bottled water in all vending machines;
- The purchase of individual container bottled water with institutional funds.”



Washington University in St. Louis

In conjunction with the new policy being implemented, bottle-filling stations were installed across campus. Macalester also hosts a free exchange program called [Mac Free Swap](#) where students and staff can drop off unwanted materials and also pick up items that they need.

In January 2013, the [University of Vermont](#)³⁸ stopped selling bottled water on campus because of student demand. The following year, research showed that the sale of beverages with added sugars unfortunately increased, and there was no significant decrease in the amount of single-use plastic drink containers being used. Gathering and analyzing the data on this were difficult, and no additional study has been done to date. However, UVM has taken positive action. The campus has increased the ratio of healthy drink options available and provides refilling stations. In 2016, UVM launched a campus campaign called “UVM Hearts Water” to lift up the health benefits of drinking local water and the environmental benefits of using reusable drink containers instead of single-use plastic containers. Additionally, UVM Dining is moving toward serving 100 percent compostable single-use products on campus for grab-and-go programs such as Simply to Go. This means working within the supply chain to ensure that products are available year-round, collaborating with chefs to product test for quality and durability, and educating students about new packaging initiatives that help lead to clean waste streams. In addition to using compostable packaging, UVM Dining also abides by a ‘Straw Upon Request’ policy and serves compostable straws when students request their use. Dining serves single-use materials only when alternatives cannot be coordinated according to practical logistics and/or food-safety standards.

Plastic Straw Bans

Plastic drinking straws are among the top 10 contributors of marine debris pollution. (Our Last Straw)³⁹

Effective July 2, 2018, [Duke University](#)⁴⁰ in North Carolina made big changes to reduce their plastic waste by banning single-use plastic carryout bags, plastic straws, and plastic utensils in their 34 campus dining venues. Their plastic bags were replaced with paper bags, and the drinkware, straws, and utensils were replaced with biodegradable products.



Duke University

A substantial impact of this policy change is that it's helped simplify the campus waste streams. As Duke works to expand their post-consumer composting infrastructure on campus, eliminating non-recyclable and non-compostable plastics helps reduce the risk of contamination. They continue to educate the campus on how to properly dispose of recyclable and compostable items, however this change had made the process a little simpler.

“Plastic straws have lost the battle and they've been banished from the campus!” reports [Knox College](#)⁴¹ in Illinois in spring 2018. Knox was the third college in the United States to ban plastic straws, replacing them with paper drinking straws in all campus dining facilities. This new effort to reduce waste on campus was initiated by the Student Senate Sustainability Committee to Bon Appétit, which manages Knox's dining services. In May 2018, [Bon Appétit](#)⁴² announced that it was banning plastic straws and stirrers company-wide.



Knox College

“It has been a successful switch and an easy step to reducing the impact that the Knox community has on our global environment,” says Director of Sustainability Initiatives Deborah Steinberg.

Beginning in August 2018, the [University of Southern California](#)⁴³ no longer offered straws in their dining halls. As the new policy was taking affect, a petition supporting the banning of straws was signed by 1,000 students and organized by the student club Environmental Core, the Environmental Student Assembly, and the undergraduate student government advocacy branch. The petition helped the policy change be more easily accepted by consumers. Plastic straws are still available upon request.

These efforts to ban or reduce the use of straws are a good step to reduce the use of plastic on campus, however, please be aware that many individuals with disabilities need straws to drink, and that reusable straws are not an option for many disabled people. Campuses should always have straws available upon request, and be considerate of the whole campus community and their needs.

Plastic Bag Bans

It takes 500 (or more) years for a plastic bag to degrade in a landfill (Center for Biological Diversity).⁴⁴

In January 2019, [University of Connecticut's Dining Services and UConnPIRG⁴⁵](#) started working together to eliminate plastic bags on campus by encouraging students, faculty, and staff to bring their own bags and by replacing plastic with environmentally friendly brown paper bags at many of the facilities on campus.

Beginning in fall 2019, [Penn State Residential Dining⁴⁶](#) no longer used plastic bags. The campus distributed 25,000 reusable bags to students, faculty, and staff, thanks to a donation from Pepsi-Cola. Additionally, the campus community

is also encouraging students, faculty, and staff to bring their own reusable bags.

Penn State's [EcoCoin⁴⁷](#), developed by students, also reduces the use of plastic bags across all campuses.

In participating stores on campus, customers can opt out of accepting a plastic bag and receive a token worth five cents that they then donate to the participating student charity of their choice.

The program has been made available to all Penn State campuses and, since summer 2018, has prevented the use of 12,000 plastic bags and raised over \$4,000 for charities.

Some campuses have started banning plastic bag use as part of state or local ordinances doing the same, such as [Ithaca College⁴⁸](#) in New York.

Additionally, a student-led petition called "If You Can't Reuse it; Refuse It – Eliminate Plastic Bags at IC", signed by more than 900 students, pushed this effort forward as well. Ithaca, like the state of New York, will ban single-use plastic bags in March 2020.



PHOTO: Anja, Pixabay

Need a partner to provide reusable bags? Learn about [Chico Bag Fundraisers](#).

In 2019 [George Mason University's](#) Facilities Management instituted a campus-wide policy that eliminated the use of plastic bags in two of their three recycling streams. Now, all "paper" recycling is bagless and only the co-mingled stream (cans, plastic, glass) retains the use of plastic bags given high

levels of residue from this recycling stream. As a result of its implementation Mason has and will continue to eliminate over 300,000 48-gallon plastic bags per year, or 55,500 lbs. of single-use plastic.

Polystyrene (Styrofoam) Bans

Among the worst forms of plastic pollution is polystyrene foam, which never fully degrades. (Environment America)⁴⁹

In September 2014, [Auburn University⁵⁰](#) in Alabama claimed their campus "Styrofoam free!" All campus and private vendors stopped using polystyrene cups and other food-serving products. Additionally, Auburn's dining facilities, Tiger Dining, meets regularly to "establish a sustainable dining experience on campus." Director of Campus Sustainability Michael Kensler said the change to paper products over foam plastic cost an extra \$5,000 per year.⁵¹



The [Colgate University Student Government Association⁵²](#) in New York unanimously passed both a resolution and a bill against Styrofoam (polystyrene) in March 2015. "The bill, acting as a change to bylaws pertaining to the Budget Allocation Committee (BAC), prohibits BAC-funded student groups from using BAC-funding to purchase polystyrene. That means when student groups host events and order pizza and drinks for pickup or delivery, there has to be explicit notice given to the vendor that Styrofoam cups or plates should not be provided. The resolution informs all Colgate departments and offices that the student body dissuades the use of Styrofoam and suggests action to reduce Styrofoam purchasing." This bill is a first step to a campus-wide ban on using this material.

STYROFOAM is a trademarked brand of closed-cell extruded polystyrene foam (XPS). **Styrofoam** is identified as the fifth largest contributor of waste in the environment, occupying an estimated 30 percent in our nation's landfills. Styrofoam is also non-biodegradable, meaning that it will stay in that landfill forever.

► Reuse, think before you trash it.

We all have a lot of stuff that we don't need. Before you throw it in the trash, think about other uses for the item. Or if the item is in good condition, find out if you can donate it to a local church or charity. Or maybe there are students or staff on campus that could benefit from your extra notebooks, clothes, small appliances, furniture, etc.

- Host a Dorm Free Cycle Event – Set up donation boxes in your dorm or throughout multiple dorms for collection. Be sure to include details on what types of items you are requesting and explain that they should be in good, working condition. Then host the free cycle event in the lobby or common room of the dorm. Work with a local church or donation center to arrange pick up for leftover items. Check out [Harvard University's 10 Tips for Hosting Successful Freecycle Events](#)⁵³ in Massachusetts.
- Host a [Fix-It Fair](#)⁵⁴ to teach students, faculty, and staff how to fix or repurpose everyday items instead of discarding them. **Towson University** in Maryland Office of Sustainability worked with campus departments and community groups, including Sew Lab (Baltimore-based company), to provide workshops on repairing items such as clothes, zippers, computers, and bikes.



Towson University

- Host a campus move-out and reduce the amount of usable items that go into the landfill. At the end of the spring semester students are finished with exams and ready to go. Coordinate a move-out event that helps student easily donate items that they no longer want. Organize by categories: clothes, school supplies, electronics, furniture, and home goods—and work with campus partners such as housing and residence life and/or the office of sustainability to identify community organizations that will accept and pick up your donations. [Check out Rutgers University in New Jersey ProjectMoveOut](#)⁵⁵.

- Work with a local [Good Will](#), [Planet Aid](#), or other nonprofit organization to have donation bins placed on your campus to make it as easy as possible for students, faculty, and staff to drop off unwanted items.

3. Recycle, Don't Trash It

*Only 9 percent of the recyclable material used in the United States is actually recycled.*⁵⁶

EDUCATION

One of the biggest opportunities on campus to help increase recycling and reduce the amount of plastics going to the landfill, or possibly into the environment, is better and more effective education regarding how to recycle properly on a regular basis. There are new students on campus each semester, and its important to provide constant and consistent information about recycling for the whole community.

Strong effective recycling programs on campus educate the students, faculty, and staff on:

| WHAT can be recycled | HOW to reduce contamination | WHERE to recycle | WHY to recycle |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|

- Ask your sustainability/facilities/operations departments for the most up-to-date information from the recycling hauler to ensure your educational signs are accurate and request that any changes be shared.
- Clear and simple signage near recycling centers on campus is essential. Post information about what can be recycled at all recycling centers on campus and how to reduce contamination of recyclable material.

