# Single-Use Plastics Elimination Guide

## For The George Washington University Community

## The GW Single-Use Plastics Elimination Guide

### *Background*

Building upon the past decade of sustainability progress, in June 2020, the George Washington University Board of Trustees Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Task Force charged the university with addressing the environmental impact of single-use plastics at GW. President Thomas LeBlanc committed to eliminating single-use plastics throughout GW's campuses, including in vending, events, dining, departmental purchases, and partners, as part of the university's larger commitment to circularity, a leading sustainability concept that seeks to separate economic activity from the consumption of finite resources to prevent waste and pollution, keep items and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems.

GW students and leadership have been engaged in dialogue around the single-use plastics issue since 2019. In response to calls to action from GW students, Mark Diaz, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, convened a Single-Use Plastics Task Force in September 2020 to build a comprehensive effort to eliminate single-use plastics within university operations. EVP & CFO Diaz is committed to making GW a leader in the elimination of single-use plastics. This commitment to eliminate single-use plastics applies to all three GW campuses: Foggy Bottom, Mount Vernon, and Virginia Science and Technology, as well as GW-owned or leased education, research centers, and other properties.

### *Single-Use Plastics Definition and Items*

Single-use plastics (SUPs) are non-essential, non-compostable disposable plastic products with an intended lifespan of one use, i.e., one meal/one drink, or disposed of within 24 hours.[1] GW is committed to eliminating the following list of SUPs for on campus; however, over time, this list may expand to include other single-use plastic items:

- Single-use plastic utensils;
- Single-use plastic beverage bottles of any size and for any kind of beverage;
- Single-use plastic straws & stirrers;
- Single-use plastic food service ware (cups, plates, bowls, trays, sauce dishes, lids);
- Single-use plastic clamshells & to-go containers; all polystyrene (Styrofoam and similar) food service products;
- Single-use plastic-lined cups and bowls (coffee cups, soup bowls, snack boats);

[1] Post-Landfill Action Network, "#BreakFreeFromPlastic Campus Pledge". Available at: https://www.postlandfill.org/bffp-pledge/.

- Single-use plastic-wrapped condiments, sauces and seasonings (butter, jelly, peanut butter, creamers, sugars, salt, pepper);
- Individually-packaged items with bulk alternatives (napkins, oyster crackers, individually-wrapped fresh baked goods, mints, toothpicks);
- Single use hot beverage packets unnecessarily packaged in plastic (K-Cups, plastic-wrapped tea bags);
- Plastic shopping bags;
- Plastic-wrapped giveaways; and
- Plastic layered sachets (small plastic packages containing small amounts of consumer goods such as condiments, detergents, or shampoos).

Readily available alternatives exist for many of the items included in this list. For example:

- Bottled beverages are available in single-serve aluminum cans, glass bottles, in powder form that can be mixed in a reusable bottle or cup, or in bulk containers;
- utensils, straws and stirrers, to-go containers, and food service ware can be replaced by reusable or compostable items;
- Individually packaged items like condiments, sauces and seasonings, napkins, hot beverage packets, and crackers are available in bulk packaging; and,
- Plastic-wrapped giveaways can be commissioned and ordered with limited packaging, and given out without any additional wrapping.

***Policy, Guidelines, and Monitoring***

GW's Single-Use Plastic Task Force will monitor items going forward, and welcomes input from the GW Community on potential items to add to the elimination list.

The Single-Use Plastics Elimination Guide -- this document -- has detailed information on how to eliminate single-use plastics as a member of the GW Community. A separate Implementation Plan outlines the action items, targets, and key performance indicators that GW will use to motivate and monitor our progress towards the goal of eliminating single-use plastics on campus, specifically the list of SUPs located above. Both of these documents are aligned with the GW Single-Use Plastics Policy, which lays out restrictions and guidance regarding single-use plastics for the GW Community, and with the GW Single-Use Plastics Compliance Guidance, which outlines the mechanism for compliance with the Single-Use Plastics Policy.

## Section 1: Why eliminate single-use plastics?

### *Plastic Pollution*

GW strives to have a positive impact on the local, regional, and global environment, and eliminating ubiquitous pollutants such as single-use plastics will impact the environment swiftly and positively.[2]

Plastic pollution, which is dominated by SUPs, is a serious concern in marine as well as terrestrial ecosystems. A 2015 study estimated that, of 275 million metric tons (MT) of plastic waste generated in coastal cities, 4.8 to 12.7 million MT entered the ocean. By 2050, experts estimate that, absent greater action, the ocean is expected to contain more plastics than fish by weight.[3]

In addition to being an unsightly addition to beaches and coastal communities across the globe, marine life consumes plastics both in large pieces and as microplastics, both which are harmful. Closer to home, the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. is one of the only rivers in the U.S. to be designated by the EPA as impaired by trash, including SUPs.[4]

While plastic manufacturers may intend for their products to be recycled instead of winding up in terrestrial or marine ecosystems, the likelihood of a single-use plastic item being successfully recycled may be quite low, depending on the item. Sometimes this is because the kind of plastic is not readily recyclable, or is not readily recyclable in a specific municipality. In other cases, it is because the item is contaminated with food or liquid (such as an unwashed takeout container) or because the item causes operational issues (such as single-use plastic grocery bags, which clog recycling machinery).[5]

Overall, the amount of recycled plastics (both single- and multi-use plastics) is small. In 2018, only 8.7% of all plastics were recycled in the U.S, with single-use polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles and jars recycled at a higher rate of 29.1%. This higher rate

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[2] Potomac Conservancy, “Ask an Expert: Why is Plastic Pollution Increasing in Virginia?” February 6, 2020. Available at: https://potomac.org/blog/2020/3/1/plastic-pollution-virginia.
[3] World Economic Forum, “The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the Future of Plastics.” January 2016. Available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_New_Plastics_Economy.pdf.
[4] Fenston, Jacon, “The Anacostia River is Full of Tiny Shards of Plastic”. *DCist*. June 13, 2019. Available at: https://dcist.com/story/19/06/13/the-anacostia-river-is-full-of-tiny-shards-of-plastic/.
[5] Department of Public Works, “Requirements for Plastic Bags and Wraps.” Available at: https://dpw.dc.gov/plasticbagremoval#:~:text=Plastic%20bags%2C%20wraps%2C%20and%20film,and%20safety%20hazards%20to%20employees.

of 29.1%, however, does not include wrappers, bags, or other sources of single-use plastics.[6]

### *Microplastics*

When not properly recycled or disposed of, plastics remain in the environment for a long time, often degrading into small pieces called "microplastics".[7] About the size of a sesame seed, these pieces are both ingested and inhaled by people and animals.[8] There is emerging evidence that these particles could leach bisphenol A and phthalates, which are known to interfere with hormones; styrene, linked to a range of health issues including nervous system problems; and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), linked to cancer among other health conditions.[9] Evidence suggests that water bottled in plastic has double the microplastic level of tap water. Microplastics may also disrupt local food webs, particularly in marine ecosystems.[10] Finally, due to their size, microplastics are extremely difficult to remove from the environment.[11]

### *Equity*

The manufacture and disposal of single-use plastics is also an equity issue. Plastic resin, the feedstock for single-use and other plastics, is produced in petrochemical factories. In the United States, the majority of these facilities are built in low-income communities and communities of color, particularly in Texas and Louisiana (also known as "Cancer Alley" for the health impacts of the extractive industry in the area).[12] These communities are burdened with regular high exposure to health-impairing toxic chemicals in their ecosystem, not to mention the impacts of catastrophic accidents at

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[6] Environmental Protection Agency, "Plastics: Material-Specific Data". Available at: https://www.epa.gov/facts-and-figures-about-materials-waste-and-recycling/plastics-material-specific-data#:~:text=While%20overall%20the%20amount%20of,plastic%20containers%20is%20more%20significant.
[7] European Chemicals Agency, "The Problem With Microplastics". European Union. Available at: https://chemicalsinourlife.echa.europa.eu/the-problem-with-microplastics.
[8] National Ocean Service, "What are microplastics?" National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Available at: https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/microplastics.html.
[9] Consumer Reports, "You're Literally Eating Microplastics. How You Can Cut Down Exposure to Them". *The Washington Post*. October 7, 2019. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/youre-literally-eating-microplastics-how-you-can-cut-down-exposure-to-them/2019/10/04/22ebdfb6-e17a-11e9-8dc8-498eabc129a0_story.html.
[10] Jambeck, Jenna R., et al. "Plastic Waste Inputs From Land Into the Ocean". *Science* Vol. 347, Issue 6223, pp. 768-771. February 13, 2015. DOI: 10.1126/science.1260352
[11] Jambeck, Jenna R., et al. "Plastic Waste Inputs From Land Into the Ocean". *Science* Vol. 347, Issue 6223, pp. 768-771. February 13, 2015. DOI: 10.1126/science.1260352
[12] Larson, Hillary. "The Deep Injustice of Plastic Pollution". Sierra Club. July 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2020/07/deep-injustice-plastic-pollution.

these factories.[13] Byproducts from the process may also be illegally disposed of on land and in waterways.[14] These facilities also emit greenhouse gases, in addition to toxins.[15]

There are also equity issues associated with the disposal of single-use plastic. If not successfully recycled domestically, SUPs enter the international waste stream, where they end up overwhelming waste markets and ecosystems in lower-income countries as part of the global recycling market.[16] Essentially, the U.S. is exporting the environmental and health consequences of plastic disposal, which include respiratory illnesses from burning or processing plastic as well as negative economic impacts on tourism due to the quantity of plastic waste in the environment. Experts estimate that between 20% - 70% of plastic that enters global recycling facilities is unusable, which means it simply becomes waste in a new location.[17]

### *Climate Change*

Finally, the manufacture and potentially even the disposal of plastics increases the amount of greenhouse gases released into the environment, accelerating climate change. The process of creating single-use plastics and plastics more generally generates greenhouse gases at every point in its life cycle: from drilling for raw materials, to the energy used and emitted during the refining process, to disposal.[18] If plastic production and use continue to grow, emissions from this process could reach 1.34 gigatons annually.[19] Carol Muffett, Head of the Center of International Environmental Law, has stated that “the plastics crisis is a climate crisis hiding in plain

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[13] Morath, Sarah J. “Insight: Plastic Pollution is an Environmental Justice Issue”. *Bloomberg Law*. july 14, 2020. Available at: https://news.bloomberglaw.com/environment-and-energy/insight-plastic-pollution-is-an-environmental-justice-issue.

[14] Larson, Hillary. “The Deep Injustice of Plastic Pollution”. Sierra Club. July 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2020/07/deep-injustice-plastic-pollution.

[15] Larson, Hillary. “The Deep Injustice of Plastic Pollution”. Sierra Club. July 30, 2020. Available at: https://www.sierraclub.org/articles/2020/07/deep-injustice-plastic-pollution.

[16] McCormick, Erin, et al. “Where does your plastic go? Global investigation reveals America’s dirty secret”. *The Guardian*. June 17, 2019. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jun/17/recycled-plastic-america-global-crisis.

[17] McCormick, Erin, et al. “Where does your plastic go? Global investigation reveals America’s dirty secret”. *The Guardian*. June 17, 2019. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jun/17/recycled-plastic-america-global-crisis.

[18] Lindwall, Courtney, “Single-Use Plastics 101”. National Resources Defense Council. January 09 2020. Available at: https://www.nrdc.org/stories/single-use-plastics-101#:~:text=Put%20simply%2C%20single%2Duse%20plastics,wrappers%2C%20straws%2C%20and%20bags.

[19] Hamilton, Lisa Anne, et al. “Plastic & Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet.” Center for International Environmental Law et al. May 2019. Available at: https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Plastic-and-Climate-FINAL-2019.pdf.

sight."[20] Research also suggests that when plastic is exposed to sunlight as it degrades in the environment, it releases the greenhouse gases methane and ethylene.[21]

**Section 2: The Solution: A New Perspective**

The solution to the single-use plastics crisis is eliminating our dependency on these products, and embracing a circular economy. The circular economy is a regenerative model that seeks to separate economic activity from the consumption of finite resources in order to design out waste and pollution, keep items and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems.[22] Within the circular economy, products are designed to be used multiple times, and if they are intended to be discarded after one use, they should not be made of material that pollutes the environment for thousands of years.

Although GW faces many significant challenges as an open campus situated in an urban environment, GW is working diligently to accomplish the aims laid out in the GW Roadmap to Zero Waste, which was published in fall 2016. The Zero Waste or Circularity approach has led to GW reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills while increasing recycling, reuse and composting. The university hired experts and formed a cross-functional team to address this initial effort, and is seeing results with a decrease in waste to landfill and an increase in recycling. This approach mimics the way waste is treated in nature by thinking of used materials, garbage and discards as potential resources for others to use. The university has made significant progress in developing initiatives for reduction, reuse and recycling.

Creating a circular economy at GW supports our efforts to eliminate single-use plastic because it allows us the opportunity to examine all of the waste generated at GW, and how to make best use of it. In order to successfully eliminate single-use plastics, GW will need to switch to reusables in many cases, but in other cases GW may need to explore switching to substitutes, such as aluminum cans instead of plastic beverage bottles, or compostable utensils and service ware instead of single-use plastic utensils and service ware. Simply throwing aluminum cans or compostable meal service ware in

[20] Joyce, Christopher, "Plastic Has a Big Carbon Footprint — But That Isn't The Whole Story," *NPR*. July 9, 2019. Available at: https://www.npr.org/2019/07/09/735848489/plastic-has-a-big-carbon-footprint-but-that-isnt-the-whole-story#:~:text=Christopher%20Joyce-,Plastic%20Has%20A%20Big%20Carbon%20Footprint%20%E2%80%94%20But,Isn't%20The%20Whole%20Story&text=Koji%20Sasahara%2FAP-,By%20one%20estimate%2C%20emissions%20from%20producing%20and%20incinerating%20plastics%20could,U.S.%20%E2%80%94%20between%20now%20and%202050.

[21] Isola, Monica. "Plastic Contributes to Global Warming as is Breaks Down, Researchers Find," *Yale Climate Connections*. November 7, 2018. Available at: https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2018/11/common-plastics-emit-global-warming-pollution/.

[22] Ellen MacArthur Foundation, "Concept: What is a circular economy? A framework for an economy that is restorative and regenerative by design". Available at: https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/concept.

the landfill instead of single-use plastics is not GW's goal; instead, GW intends for recycling, composting, and communications to support the proper reuse, regeneration, or disposal of alternatives to single-use plastics.

The circularity approach guides the single-use plastic elimination effort through the following four steps:

- ***Eliminate* plastic**: Eliminate plastic packaging around obvious items like bananas, which have a natural protective peel.
- ***Reuse* items:** Discard items like plastic pens or smartphone cases only when they have reached the end of their life.
- ***Redesign* products:** Items like surgical gloves are intended to be single use for health and safety reasons. Redesign these items to use a material that is biodegradable.
- **Find *alternative* opportunities:** Switch to a reusable product whenever possible, like opting for a reusable water bottle, utensils, or service ware set over single use plastic bottles and service ware.

The following guidance is intended to help members of the GW Community comply with the single-use plastics policy. Below is information on how members of the GW Community can implement the policy, including suggested alternatives to single-use plastics. This document will be updated as new alternatives arise in the market.

**Section 3: Guidance for Hosting Events**

- No GW funds, such as P-Card funds or student organization funds provided by GW, may be used for the purchase of any single-use plastics on the elimination list. Training is available on the Single-Use Plastics Policy and will be provided to all P-Card holders and to student organization leaders.
- For more information on how to make your events sustainable, beyond the elimination of single-use plastics, please consult the Green Events Guide.
- *Water*: Plastic bottled water for individual use is not permitted under the policy.
    - For small events, encourage attendees to bring reusable water bottles and point them in the direction of the nearest water bottle filler or kitchen; alternatively, provide reusable pitchers of water and glasses.
    - For large events, encourage attendees to bring reusable water bottles, and consider supplementing nearby outdoor and indoor bottle fillers with bulk water from another source, such as large reusable coolers provided by your caterer (if you are using a caterer) or another bulk water supplier.
    - For some large outdoor events, you may be able to request a portable outdoor bottle filling station by booking through GW Events to supplement the permanent outdoor bottle filling stations throughout campus.

    - If providing single-use compostable water cups of any kind, ensure that you have composting bins and staff or volunteers to manage the compost at the event to properly dispose of the cups and any other compostable materials.
- *Food*: If serving food, ask your caterer to minimize plastic packing material as much as possible. Instruct them not to provide single-use plastic utensils or other service ware. If they are providing condiments, ask that these be provided in bulk containers. If after discussing these alternatives, the vendor is unable to accommodate those requests, we recommend--but do not require--that you find a different caterer.
- *Hot beverages*: If you're providing hot beverages at your event, encourage attendees to bring their own reusable mug. If you provide compostable cups, then have a strategy to dispose of them properly. Provide beverages in bulk instead of in individually-wrapped packets (e.g., tea).
- *Cold beverages*: Plastic bottled cold beverage containers should not be purchased or procured either by the event host or through the caterer (such as plastic liters of soda, lemonade, etc.) Reusable dispensers of cold beverages (for example, a large dispenser of iced tea) are allowed, in conjunction with reusable or compostable cups. Aluminum canned or glass beverages are also permitted, such as canned or glass bottled sodas and sparkling waters. Ensure recycling signage is clearly visible for proper disposal.
- *Utensils and service ware*: Plastic forks, knives, and spoons; plates, bowls, and cups; straws and stirrers; and to-go containers, should not be purchased using GW funds. If a caterer offers to bring these items as part of your purchase of food, decline the offer or request that they bring compostable items. If after discussing these alternatives, the vendor is unable to accommodate those requests, we recommend that you find a different caterer. Ensure that your event has composting available if requesting or purchasing compostable utensils and service ware. You may also want to encourage attendees to bring their own reusable utensil sets, or even to offer this as a giveaway item during your event. If your event has full-service plated meals, consider requesting that your caterer provide reusable utensils and service ware in lieu of disposable items.
- *Condiments and other bulk dining items*: Provide condiments (e.g. ketchup), coffee and tea fixings (e.g. sugar), and other dining items (e.g., napkins) in bulk containers instead of single-use packets.
- *Waste disposal*: Ensure that recycling and trash bins are clearly labeled. If you choose to collect compostable material, ensure that staff and/or volunteers are available to monitor composting bins to avoid contamination.

- *Giveaways*: Work with the giveaway provider to minimize single-use plastics used to package the item. Prioritize giving away items that are reusable and multi-use.
- *Other plastic products*: Use reusable name-tags, and collect them from attendees at the end of the event for reuse.

**Section 4: Guidance for Offices**

- No GW funds, such as P-Card funds, should be used for the purchase of any single-use plastics on the elimination list. Training will be provided to all P-Card holders on the Single-Use Plastics Policy.
- For more information on how to make your office more sustainable, beyond the elimination of single-use plastics, join the Green Office Network.
- *Water*: Plastic bottled water for individual use is not permitted under the policy. Instead, install an in-line filtration system, switch to tap water, or use a nearby bottle fill station. Offices may also wish to purchase reusable pitchers and glasses for use during meetings.
- *Plastic bags*: Plastic bags, such as the bags used for grocery shopping, can be collected in a central location and a designated staff member can recycle these bags at a local grocery store (Whole Foods, Safeway, etc.)
- *Hot beverages*:
    - Offices using single-serve plastic hot beverage machines, such as Keurig or Flavia machines, can switch to either:
        - Compostable pods - available for Keurig or a machine such as this
            - If you have a Keurig machine, your options include:
                - OneCUP Pods
                - PURPOD100
                - EcoPod
            - If you opt for the compostable pods compatible with a Keurig Machine, these pods should NOT be disposed of in either the recycling bin or waste bin. Pods must be separated and stored for compost pickup.
        - Reusable pods - available for Keurig only
            - Keurig Reusable Filter
        - A Nespresso machine that uses aluminum capsules
        - A bulk hot beverage dispenser such as this
        - A beverage pot or urn such as this
        - Filtered hot water for use with instant coffee and compliant bagged or loose tea

    - If the office provides coffee/tea fixings that come enclosed in single-serve plastic (e.g., individual creamer packets), the office should switch to providing the item in bulk.
- *Cold beverages*: Plastic bottled cold beverage containers should not be purchased or procured through catering (such as liters of soda, lemonade, etc.) Aluminum canned or glass beverages are permitted, such as canned or glass bottled sodas and sparkling waters.
- *Utensils and service ware*: Plastic forks, knives, and spoons; plates, bowls, and cups; straws and stirrers; and to-go containers, should not be purchased using GW funding. If a caterer offers to bring these items as part of your purchase of food, decline the offer or request that they bring compostable items. Ensure that your office has composting available if requesting or purchasing compostable utensils and service ware for meetings or daily use, and that your office has adequate signage directing people to the correct place to dispose of compost. Another route would be to purchase reusable utensil sets and service ware for all members of your office or department, and request that they bring these utensils to meetings where meals are served; or to invest in a full set of shared reusable utensils and service ware for your office. Dishwasher installation may be requested through Facilities Planning, Construction, and Management.
- *Packing*: If your office is responsible for packing/shipping, note that polystyrene (such as Styrofoam packing peanuts) may not be used under the single-use plastics elimination policy. Request alternate packing materials that comply with the policy from your suppliers.

**Section 5: Frequently Asked Questions**

1. How does the elimination of single-use plastics impact people with disabilities who need to use plastic straws?

Plastic straws have been banned in DC since January 2019. Regarding customers with disabilities: "Please note that DOEE recognizes some customers with disabilities require plastic straws as a reasonable accommodation to consume food or beverages. Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act and the DC Human Rights Act, some customers may request single use plastic straws to consume food and beverages. Regulated entities must keep a stock of plastic straws available to meet these needs and remain compliant."

2. Can I buy a bottle of water or other single-use plastic item while I'm traveling on GW business and using my P-Card for purchases?

Yes. While the intent of the single-use plastics elimination effort is a culture change around the way we at GW purchase single-use plastic items, the policy is specific to university operations and activities held on GW property (owned or leased). Still, all

members of the GW Community are encouraged to travel with their reusable items when feasible.

3. My department or student organization would like to use a caterer for an event. What should we do if the caterer is not able to avoid all single-use plastics?

First, look for a caterer who is able to avoid any single-use plastic in your order, and use reusable items whenever possible. Request that your caterer avoid single-use plastic items as indicated in GW's list found on page 2 of this document. You are not required to find a new vendor if the request cannot be accommodated, but you are encouraged to work with your caterer to avoid plastic in packaging, cutlery, service ware, and condiments as much as possible.

4. If our offices uses single-us plastic hot beverage machines for coffee or tea, such as Keurig or Flavia machines, what should we do?

Offices can switch to one of these options:

a. Compostable pods - available for Keurig or a machine such as this
    i. If you have a Keurig machine, your options include:
        1. OneCUP Pods
        2. PURPOD100
        3. EcoPod
    ii. If you opt for the compostable pods compatible with a Keurig Machine, these pods should NOT be disposed of in either the recycling bin or waste bin. Pods must be separated and stored for compost pickup.
b. Reusable pods - available for Keurig only
    i. Keurig Reusable Filter
c. A Nespresso machine that uses aluminum capsules
d. A bulk hot beverage dispenser such as this
e. A beverage pot or urn such as this
f. Filtered hot water for use with instant coffee and compliant bagged or loose tea

5. Over the years my department/student organization/office has accumulated a lot of single-use plastic utensils service ware (plates, cups, forks, etc.) from caterers and through P-Card purchasing. Can we still use it?

Yes. Departments and student organizations are permitted to use their backstock of single-use plastic items until this inventory is exhausted.

6. Can I bring my own single-use plastic item, which I purchased with my own money off-campus, to use on campus?

Yes, this is permitted. Still, all members of the GW Community are encouraged to use reusable items when feasible.

7. I purchased single-use plastics for my department/organization/office with my own money, before I knew about the elimination but after the policy was officially announced. Will I be reimbursed for this purchase?

Individuals in the GW Community should take all reasonable efforts to avoid using single-use plastics on GW property where alternatives are available. Supervisors will be responsible for ensuring that their team is eliminating the use of single-use plastics, with the understanding that it will take some time to transition to a new way of purchasing items. The university will review and audit purchases on a regular basis and the Office of Sustainability is available to help find alternatives.

8. Is there a buying guide or other list of recommended products I should purchase instead of purchasing a single-use plastic product?

A list of potential alternatives to single-use plastic will be made available in the future for members of the GW Community to consult.

9. My team has purchased giveaways that are made of plastic -- are these items a violation of the single-use plastics policy?

If the giveaway is reusable, like a pen, a stress ball, a reusable mug, etc., then the item itself is not in violation of the single-use plastics policy. However, if the items were ordered from the manufacturer and came wrapped in single-use plastic packaging, this would be in violation of the single-use plastics policy. As a result, it is best to work with the manufacturer/distributor of the giveaway item to ensure that the items are not individually wrapped in single-use plastic and that packaging for the product overall is minimal.

10. Can I still purchase single-use plastics with GWorld dollars?

Since GWorld dollars are your personal funds, yes, GWorld dollars may be used to pay for single-use plastics. However, purchases of single-use plastic items with GWorld dollars will not be reimbursed by the university.

11. Are there any repercussions for using single-use plastics on campus? If so, what?

While disciplinary actions would not be taken for using single-use plastics on campus, all members of the GW Community are encouraged to avoid the use of single-use plastics and use reusable items when feasible.

12. What differentiates a single-use plastic from a multi-use plastic? Is there a resource for this?

A single-use plastic is intended to be used once and then disposed of. A multi-use, or reusable plastic item, is intended to be used indefinitely. Some items are clearly intended to be used multiple times, such as a sturdy reusable plastic shopping bag sold by the grocery store as an alternative to a single-use plastic bag. Others may be more ambiguous -- you may reuse a single-use plastic fork multiple times, washing it in between uses, but the item is manufactured and intended to be used only one time before disposal, and therefore falls under the GW single-use plastics policy.

13. How does this relate to COVID safety protocols?

Recommendations made in the GW Single-Use Plastics Plan and the supplementary guide are secondary to official guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Since guidance from the CDC changes frequently, please be sure to check their recommendations. The purchase of single-use plastic where there is no disposable alternative (e.g., compostable disposable alternative) based on current CDC guidance will not be prohibited by GW.

14. Does the elimination of single-use plastics include plastics needed for art projects for Corcoran students?

Exceptions may include purchases for art projects where alternatives to single-use plastics may be prohibitive. If there is no readily available alternative to the single-use plastics used in your project, you may continue to use single-use plastics. Such exceptions are to be determined by the supervisor of purchases at the department, division, or school.

15. Are off-campus events hosted by a GW organization included in the elimination effort?

The Single-Use Plastics Policy applies to activities on campus. To aid the supervisor of purchases at the department, division, or school, clarification can be made on the P-Card purchase or invoice that the event took place off-campus. Still, all members of the GW Community are encouraged to avoid the use of single-use plastics and use reusable items when feasible.

16. Are off-campus students responsible for following this policy?

The Single-Use Plastics Policy sets forth GW's commitment for a changed culture in our community.

17. Is the commitment to eliminating single-use plastics going to raise the cost of living? How can we ensure the shift will be an equitable one, not overburdening lower-income students?

Feedback is essential to ensuring that equity issues are addressed. Please email sustaingw@gwu.edu with any equity-related concerns related to the single-use plastics elimination effort.

18. Does the elimination of single-use plastics include plastics I need for my lab or medical research?

If there is no readily available alternative to the single-use plastics used in your lab or medical research, you may continue to use single-use plastics. This issue will be revisited periodically as alternatives to single-use plastics are developed and brought to market. To aid the supervisor of purchases at the department, division, or school, clarification can be made on the P-Card purchase or invoice. Still, all members of the GW Community are encouraged to avoid the use of single-use plastics and use reusable items when feasible.

19. Will purchases on a P-card be included in the single-use plastics elimination effort?

Yes. P-card holders are expected to adhere to the single-use plastics elimination effort by avoiding all purchases of the single-use plastics included in the elimination list.

20. How will the university enforce purchases of single-use plastic made on a P-card?

Training will be provided for P-card users and approvers. Where alternatives to single-use plastics are not feasible, exceptions are determined by the supervisor of purchases at the department, division, or school. Additionally, audits of P-card purchases and procurement will be conducted to determine areas for improved performance.

21. Can supervisors approve an expense report if single-use plastics were purchased?

All purchases of single-use plastics on the elimination list require approval by the supervisor of purchases at the department, division, or school.