



“Break Free From Plastic” Pledge

Emory University is ranked among the top research universities for sustainability performance, and together with Oxford College, the Emory enterprise has a long-term commitment to sustainability practices. Our community already has a robust waste diversion system, formal sustainability courses, and a [Sustainability Vision & Strategic Plan, 2025](#) that is shared by administrators, faculty, staff, and students alike. Yet, there is nothing that directly acknowledges the need to reduce unnecessary single-use plastic (SUP) consumption. Now is an opportune time to further Emory’s commitments because the City of Atlanta recently enacted [Ordinance 19-O-1418](#) to eliminate plastic bags, plastic straws and styrofoam. Emory should align with this ordinance and identify ways to reduce other unnecessary SUP as well.

Single-use plastics are known to be a source of greenhouse gas emissions, to perpetuate environmental injustices experienced mostly by marginalized communities who live close to landfills and factories where plastics are made, and to threaten wildlife and overall environmental health of our communities and ecosystems. Unfortunately, the current rate of plastic production far outweighs our ability to recycle it.

We recognize that our society relies heavily on plastic due to its disposability, durability, and convenience which makes some SUP difficult to replace entirely. The healthcare industry recommends some single-use plastic for preventing the spread of bacteria and disease. Additionally, community members with physical disabilities, medical conditions, financial limitations, or those teaching or conducting research may rely on SUP items. Therefore, we see opportunities to make progress to reduce the consumption of unnecessary SUP that does not compromise the use of plastic for these needs. Through our institutional and individual choices, SUP reduction is possible.

This pledge furthers Emory’s commitment to divert 95% of its waste from municipal landfills, support culture change towards a “reduce, repair, restore, and reuse” mentality, “cradle to cradle” purchasing, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45% by 2030, and reach net zero emissions by 2050 by setting out a roadmap for elimination of unnecessary SUP in our community.

By 2025, Emory University and Oxford College pledge to:

- Establish a “Plastic Free Task Force” to engage stakeholders to enact this Pledge
- Implement a year-by-year SUP reduction strategy
- Continue to use viable alternatives and implement purchasing guidelines to eliminate the procurement of unnecessary SUP in the future
- Further invest in education, resources, and infrastructure to reduce SUP use on individual and institutional levels
- Increase effort to eliminate plastic bags, plastic straws, and styrofoam in accordance with Atlanta’s Ordinance 19-O-1418

Dated here:

June 28, 2021

By: President Fenves

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to the President mentioned in the text.

