

FAQ: AUS Bans Single-Use Plastic

WHAT IS SINGLE-USE PLASTIC AND WHY IS IT A PROBLEM?

Single-use plastics, or disposable plastics, are used only once before they are thrown away. These items are things like plastic bags, take-away cups, coffee stirrers, soda and water bottles, and most food packaging. Globally, we produce roughly 300 million tons of plastic each year and half of it is disposable! World-wide only 10 to 13 percent of plastic items are recycled. Petroleum-based plastic is not biodegradable and usually goes into a landfill where it is buried or it gets into the water and finds its way into the ocean. Although plastic will not biodegrade (decompose into a natural substance like soil,) it will degrade (break down) into tiny particles, so called microplastics. In the process of breaking down, it releases toxic chemicals (additives that were used to shape and harden the plastic), which make their way into our food and water supply.

WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN?

AUS is committed to creating a campus that meets the high standards of environmental sustainability, and sets a standard for environmental sustainability that other organizations can follow. AUS acknowledges the enormous environmental cost of petroleum-based single-use plastics, and the pervasive negative impact these materials have at a local, regional and global level. Banning single-use plastics from the AUS campus, wherever practical, is an important way in which AUS can significantly reduce its waste contribution and improve its environmental credentials. AUS hopes that the single-use plastics ban will encourage students and other AUS stakeholders to adopt similar environmentally friendly practices in all aspects of their lives, now and in the future.

WHAT IS COVERED UNDER THE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAN?

Petroleum-based single-use plastic is abundant in modern life. Eliminating this much-used material on the AUS campus will be a challenge, given how pervasive single-use plastic is in many parts of our lives. To eliminate all single-use plastic at once would be unrealistic. We believe we will have greater success by eliminating single-use plastics in a phased approach, as outlined below.

In the first phase of the ban, which will come into effect in January 2020, we will target petroleum-based single-use plastic items where an environmentally friendly alternative exists in the market that does not compromise the health and safety of the AUS community.

Items which will be banned from the AUS campus during this first phase include plastic cups, Styrofoam cups, Styrofoam take-away containers, plastic shopping bags and plastic water containers holding less than 500 ml of water.

AUS is working hard to find suitable alternatives to petroleum-based single-use plastic. Items such as coffee lids, iced drink cups, salad bowls, straws and cutlery (among others) will no longer be available on campus in the form of a single-use plastic, but will be replaced with the more environmentally friendly plant-based and biodegradable material, PLA (Poly Lactic Acid). Where possible, other single-use plastic items such as plates, shopping bags, take-away containers, drink stirrers and drink stoppers will be substituted with items made from paper, wood, cornstarch and sugarcane-based alternatives. Where possible, single-use plastics containing juice and soda drinks will be substituted with aluminum containers (which can be recycled almost infinitely without loss of quality).

Lastly, there are some single-use plastic items that will remain on campus during the first phase of the ban. These include single-use plastics containing food items produced or prepared off campus. Such food items include chocolate bars, snacks packs, ready-made sandwiches, cakes and flatbreads, and others. Manufacturers are required follow strict guidelines to ensure food safety during transportation, with single-use plastics often required to meet such guidelines.

Single-use plastic 500ml water bottles will be exempt from the first phase of the ban. Given the extreme climate in which AUS is located, the university has decided not to restrict access to drinking water by banning single-use 500ml plastic water bottles on campus during the first phase of the ban. This will give the AUS community time to adjust to becoming single-use plastic free, and adopt new norms for how water is consumed. The 500ml single-use plastic bottles will be included in the second phase of the ban, likely to come into effect before the end of 2020.

While the single-use plastic ban applies only to the AUS campus, AUS is committed to adhering to its single-use plastics ban and will not use any of the single-use plastics described above when taking part in external events, such as student recruitment exhibitions.

WHY AREN'T 500ML SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BOTTLES INCLUDED IN THE FIRST-PHASE OF THE AUS SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN?

As much as AUS wants to see its campus free of plastic water bottles, the health and well-being of the AUS community is a priority. Given the extreme climate in which AUS is located, the university has therefore decided not to restrict access to drinking water by banning single-use 500ml plastic water bottles on campus during the first phase of the ban. However, AUS is attempting to reduce the number of these single-use 500ml plastic water bottles being purchased on campus by providing students, staff, faculty and visitors with free stainless-steel reusable bottles and increasing the number of water dispensers on campus. Single-use plastic 500ml water bottles will be included in the second phase of the ban, likely to come into effect before the end of 2020.

WHO DOES THE SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN APPLY TO?

Under the single-use plastics ban, all food and beverage vendors on campus will be required to stop offering any of the above mentioned single-use plastic items.

Under the single-use plastics ban, all third-party vendors providing catering on campus will be required to stop offering any of the above mentioned single-use plastic items.

Under the single-use plastics ban, organizers of campus events (whether led by AUS or an external third party) are requested to minimize the use of petroleum-based, single use plastics.

DOES THE BAN APPLY TO SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BEING BROUGHT ONTO THE CAMPUS BY STUDENTS, STAFF, FACULTY OR VISITORS FOR PERSONAL USE?

AUS cannot stop individuals bringing single-use plastics onto campus for their personal use. It is important to note that no disciplinary action will be taken against individuals who do so. However, AUS strongly encourages members of its community and visitors to its campus to avoid single-use plastics. Through the widespread provision of stainless steel reusable water bottles and water dispensers on campus, along with awareness and education campaigns, AUS hopes that its community and campus visitors support its mission to minimize their use of single-use plastics.

WHEN IS THE SINGLE-USE PLASTIC BAN COMING INTO EFFECT AT AUS?

The official start for the first phase of the AUS single-use plastic ban is scheduled for the first day of class for the Spring 2020 semester, which is January 26, 2020. Between now and January 2020, we will be working closely with on-campus food and beverage outlets to ensure they are ready for the ban. If food and beverage outlets are ready to go single-use plastic free prior to January 2020, we urge them to do so.

The second phase of the ban, which will see 500ml single-use plastic water bottles included, is likely to come into effect before the end of 2020.

WHY BRING IN A SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN? WHY NOT JUST RECYCLE SINGLE-USE PLASTICS?

The UAE produces hundreds of thousands of tons of waste every day, most of which cannot be recycled. Of all the household waste we produce, more than 90 percent ends up in the landfill. It's obvious that in order to make a change we need to focus on eliminating waste in our everyday lives, not just rely on recycling (which in itself requires significant resources). Eliminating and substituting single-use plastics will significantly reduce AUS' waste contribution.

HOW IS AUS HELPING ITS COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS TO ADAPT TO THE SINGLE-USE PLASTICS BAN?

AUS acknowledges that becoming single-use plastics free can be challenging for all stakeholders. A transition period is therefore currently underway, where the ban is not yet in place, and stakeholders can take gradual steps towards becoming single-use plastics free. Through the Sustainability office, AUS is offering advice and support to all stakeholders, including:

- working with on-campus food and beverage outlets to implement the changes prior to the January 2020 deadline
- developing guidelines that will help event organizers create on-campus events that are single-use plastic free
- educating AUS' external catering partners about how the implementation of the single-use plastic ban will impact their food and beverage offering
- rolling out an on-campus awareness and engagement campaign designed to make stakeholders aware of the facts of the ban and encourage them to get on board; this includes posters alerting stakeholders to water dispensers, social media messages, on-campus posters and more
- providing free stainless steel drink bottles to stakeholders and increasing the number of water dispensers available on campus.

HOW CAN I HELP TO ACHIEVE AUS' GOALS FOR A SINGLE-USE PLASTICS FREE CAMPUS?

Here are four suggestions that can help you make a real impact and get you a step closer to living a zero-waste lifestyle:

1. Start bringing a reusable water bottle to campus. There are water dispensers in every academic building, including the library, where you can refill your reusable water bottles for free.
2. Stop drinking coffee/tea in take away cups. You can either opt for ceramic cups provided in each coffee shop or bring your own reusable container to have your coffee/tea on the go.
3. Stop using plastic shopping bags. Try bringing your own reusable bag instead.
4. Avoid take-away food. Instead, you can dine in the restaurant where they will provide you with a ceramic plate and metal cutlery that can be washed and re-used.