



SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING QUICK GUIDE: SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Ecology Center and Safer States' Sustainable Purchasing Quick Guides are a series of fact sheets highlighting sustainable purchasing options for high volume, high impact products. They are designed to help cities, counties, and states create safer communities through the purchase of more environmentally and socially conscious products.

Why Single-use Plastics?

Single-use plastics have become ubiquitous in our everyday lives - we are surrounded by cups, straws, grocery bags, cutlery, water bottles, and food containers, to name a few. Half of all plastic produced is for single-use products. Recently, an [international commission concluded](#) that plastic production, use and disposal is responsible for significant harms to human health, the economy, and the environment, and that the use is not sustainable. These harms occur at every stage of the plastic life cycle, from extraction to disposal. Plastic production requires the use of toxic chemicals and is a significant source of toxic chemical releases and microplastic pollution. Single-use products are also a significant source of pollution in the environment; about [89% of plastics](#) in the ocean are single-use plastics. Reducing single-use plastics is possible by switching to reusable or non-plastic options.

Solutions: Municipalities Taking Action

Many municipalities ban or restrict single-use plastics via public policy. Increasingly, municipalities are also reducing single-use plastics through procurement. The [City of Palo Alto, CA](#) has prohibited the purchase of styrofoam and non-recyclable food containers and banned them from City-sponsored events. Procurement of styrofoam food serviceware is prohibited by the [City of San Jose, CA](#). The City of Sunnyvale, CA has prohibited procurement of single-use [water bottles](#) and foam food and drink [containers](#). The City of San Francisco, CA requires the use of [reusable cups](#) at events that require a City permit or are held on City property. Seattle, WA and Portland, OR have promoted the use of [reusable totes](#) in their contracts to curb the use of single-use plastic bags.

Benefits

The benefits of reducing single-use plastics are clear: reducing the amount of toxic chemicals released into the environment reduces our exposure to toxic chemicals and reduces the amount of plastics that litter our land and water. In addition to the health and environmental benefits, switching to more sustainable alternatives can also mean cost savings. Purchasing reusable products cuts down on repurchasing and disposal costs.

Tools and Resources

- Ecology Center Directory of Sustainable Purchasing: [Single-use Food Serviceware](#) and [Packaging](#); Directory of resources for safer and sustainable products
- [RPN's Supply Chain Plastic Packaging Reduction Project](#); Resources for reducing plastic packaging
- [GreenScreen Certified's Standard for Reusable Food Packaging, Food Service Ware, & Cookware](#); Guidance document for GreenScreen Certified's foodware standards
- [Avoiding Hidden Hazards A Purchaser's Guide to Safer Foodware](#); Guidance to help purchasers to navigate healthier disposable foodware purchasing