



# MASON'S RESPONSE TO EXECUTIVE ORDER 77

## *Eliminating Single-Use Plastics and Polystyrene*

October 12, 2021

## ELIMINATION TIMELINE

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### Mason Purchasers and Vendors,

Executive Order Seventy-Seven (EO 77) “Virginia Leading by Example to Reduce Plastic Pollution and Solid Waste” *requires the elimination of single-use plastics and polystyrene from all state executive branch agencies*, including Mason. It also mandates solid waste (trash) reductions of 25% of solid waste per year. To achieve these goals, Mason is taking action on the following timeline.

### Single-Use Plastics and Polystyrene CESSATION ITEMS – eliminated in July 2021:

#### FOODSERVICE ITEMS:

(e.g., flatware, cups, plates, bowls, serving items, stirrers/stoppers, clamshells, deli gloves, etc.)

- Were eliminated in July 2021
  - *by the Governor's mandate, you cannot buy, sell, or distribute single-use polystyrene or plastic foodservice items for office use, events, etc.*
    - *Use up all remaining stock in breakrooms, etc. by December 1, 2021, and please donate unopened boxes to local food shelters, etc.*
  - *Mason is working with the only regional industrial composter, Freestate Farms, to pivot to safe compostables. ANY stock you purchase for events, office gatherings, etc. (e.g., plates, cups, flatware, etc.) MUST be certified as compostable by the [Compost Manufacturing Alliance \(CMA\)](#) and/or the [Biodegradable Products Institute \(BPI\)](#).*
    - *Other “biodegradable” or “compostable” items are NOT acceptable for purchase, use, or distribution due to safety concerns surrounding per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and other chemicals in non-third-party-certified items. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has [classified PFAS as a class of toxic chemicals](#), so Mason must protect the health and safety of people by purchasing the appropriate items. The Circular Economy and Zero Waste (CEZW) Task Force created a [Reference List](#) that includes items free of PFAS and that will also break down in the compost site managed by Freestate Farms. Many biodegradable and compostable items are not CMA or BPI certified nor do they meet field testing standards, so [please contact the CEZW Task Force](#) for further guidance before making a purchase.*

#### STRAWS:

- All single-use plastic straws were eliminated in July 2021

- Third-party (BPI, CMA, etc.) certified compostable alternatives are available upon request instead.

## BOTTLES:

- **Plastic water bottles were eliminated in July 2021 from vending, retail, purchasing, use, etc.**
  - **By the Governor's mandate, you cannot buy, sell, distribute, or use these for events, etc. for on- or off-campus purposes.**
    - [Please contact the Circular Economy and Zero Waste \(CEZW\) Task Force](#) for information on how to obtain stock of the Dasani aluminum can. Other alternatives include offering BPI or CMA certified compostable cups with a large carafe for refills, or displaying a sign directing participants to the nearest water fountain or [water refill station](#). You can also purchase canned sparkling water at grocery stores, which is readily available.
- **All other plastic bottles**
  - **Switch all purchases of other plastic bottles *as soon as possible* for all beverages that have aluminum can or glass alternatives (e.g., when purchasing soda, tea, etc. in a grocery store, etc.), or use refillable carafes paired with approved compostable cups or reusable cups, for all items, etc.**
    - The exact transition timelines for other bottled beverages in vending, etc. is still to be determined; however, the university is required to meet yearly 25% reduction benchmarks as a state agency and is also required to eliminate 100% of its stock by 2025.
      - *There are only potentially very limited exemptions or extensions for product lines not offered in aluminum cans, glass bottles, paper, or refillable alternatives, pending regulatory approval.*
    - Once the official transition timelines are released, all events and purchases must follow minimum guidance. In addition, increased quantities of aluminum cans will be available through catering and other sites on campus.

## BAGS:

- **Plastic shopping and small (e.g., sandwich, etc.) bags were eliminated in July 2021.**
  - ***by the Governor's mandate you cannot buy, sell, distribute, or use these for events, office use, etc. for on- or off-campus purposes.***
    - *For bags that you receive with other purchases: when purchasing items from a store, please select paper bag options and request that of vendors, caterers, etc.*
    - *For bags you purchase: Mason banned single-use plastic bags as of July 21, 2021, and is using single-use paper bags that are 100% recycled content and/or Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper. This mitigates Mason's contribution to global deforestation. Alternatively, reusable bags are encouraged: a "reusable bag" must last more than 125 washing cycles over its lifetime. Examples of paper bags that meet the requirements are found in the [Reference List](#).*
- **Small bin liners (under 23 gallons)**
  - The Governor's mandate required elimination by July 2021. However, an extension was requested for 100% elimination by December 2022.
    - *Note: Based upon inventory and audits, Mason uses between 1.4 to 1.6 million small plastic bin liners per year, each of which only contain 1 to 2 items! To pursue environmental and fiscal resource responsibility, the university will be exploring the removal of bins and liners, and will need to do so by next year.*
- **Large bin liners (23 gallons and over)**
  - A 4-year public health and safety extension was requested and approved. Mason will eliminate the use of large bin liners by December 2025.
    - *Note: In addition, Mason will continue to explore ways to reduce the number of bins and bags used.*

## Single-Use Plastics and Polystyrene PHASE-OUT ITEMS:

*Do not buy, sell, distribute, or use the following for events, office or breakroom use, etc., for on- or off-campus purposes:*

### Stop Purchasing, Selling, Distributing by the End of 2021

- **Balloons** (eliminate; alternatives are not permitted)
- **Coffee pods** (eliminate; see the [Reference List](#) for compostable alternatives, or use a refillable pod alternative)
- **Plastic table cloths** (eliminate; use reusable, durable, and washable cloth alternatives, or kraft paper alternatives that are recyclable in the mixed paper stream)
- **Confetti** (eliminate; use paper-based alternatives, if necessary, that are recyclable)
- **Glitter** (eliminate; alternatives are not permitted)
- **Ribbon, streamers, string** (eliminate; use paper-based alternatives)
- **Single-use name tags and sheets of tags** (eliminate; use durable reusables or reusable name tag holders with paper inserts)
- **Bag ties** (eliminate; use reusable alternatives, use bags that can be tied using their handles to form a knot, or purchase bags that do not need to be tied )
- **Polystyrene coolers:** An extension will be requested for lab use only. [Please contact the Circular Economy and Zero Waste \(CEZW\) Task Force](#) and work with them on alternatives.
- **Single-use plastic-based, polystyrene and foam promotional items** (eliminate; use reusable or paperboard-based recyclable options)
  - Reusable bags are great giveaways; however, for bags purchased as giveaways, they must be washable and durable for cleaning, meaning they last for more than 125 washing cycles over their lifetime. If the bags do not meet this criteria, they are considered "single-use" and cannot be purchased, sold, distributed, or used.
  - *Note: cheap and low-quality reusable plastic promotional items (e.g., cheap bottles or bags, etc.) or fast fashion items, like cheap t-shirts, are often found in the trash or donated by the thousands during Patriot PackOut – over 6,000 lbs worth in 2019. [Please contact the Circular Economy and Zero Waste \(CEZW\) Task Force](#) to learn about better alternatives when purchasing reusables that are sustainably-sourced and durable as alternative options. Please explore using giveaway wheels and other strategies to give away items to select participants rather than each person that attends a program or event. This will decrease the number of items you need to purchase and allow you to purchase fewer high-quality, durable, and reusable items that are sustainably-sourced and manufactured.*

### Other Single-Use Plastics and Polystyrene to eliminate – (the exact elimination dates are still to be determined)

- **Disposable cleaning wipes** (eliminate; please switch as soon as possible to paper and/or reusable cloths with concentrated cleaning solutions in reusable spray bottles)
- **Mops and other disposable cleaning supplies** (eliminate; use durable, washable, and reusable alternatives)

- **Plastic packaging material, bubble wrap, plastic mailers**, etc. (eliminate; use paper or paperboard alternatives)
- **Packing tape** (eliminate; switch to kraft tape)
- **Short-term use zip, cable, or bag ties** (eliminate; use reusable alternatives, use bags that can be tied using their handles to form a knot, or purchase bags that do not need to be tied)
- **Plastic-based, pre-packaged food containers and wrappers** (vending, stores, etc.) the items that must be eliminated are currently being determined and more information will be shared soon.
- **Gloves:** deli gloves were eliminated in July 2021; this is for *other* single-use gloves except where needed for critical lab work or health and safety standards.
  - Explorations of a "take-back" program are ongoing.
- **Plastic disposable tape** (eliminate; an alternative is still to be determined)
- **Other or Miscellaneous** single-use plastic and polystyrene items will also be eliminated as they are identified.

## CATERING

- Another important resource for Mason purchasers is the new [Approved Caterers List](#) created by Operations and Business Services. [This List](#) displays the currently approved caterers that have completed the updated catering agreement that requires the use of 100% compostable foodservice items when working with George Mason University. The [Approved Caterers List](#) can be found at <http://go.gmu.edu/ApprovedCaterers>.
  - Approved caterers must use third-party (BPI, CMA, etc.) certified compostable alternatives or aluminum cans (e.g., Mason Catering offers the Dasani water can as an option for events catering) for all of their disposable items and they must comply with the requirements set forth in this “Elimination Timeline” document whenever they work with the university.