



The Corporation of the County of Huron

# Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy

Prepared by the Conservation Committee  
September 2020

# Table of Contents

- 1. Background** ..... 3
  - 1.1 Purpose ..... 3
  - 1.2 Single-Use Items ..... 3
  - 1.3 Environmental Impact ..... 3
  - 1.4 Guiding Principle ..... 4
  - 1.5 Objectives ..... 4
  
- 2. Recommendations** ..... 4
  - 2.1 Cutlery & Dishware ..... 5
  - 2.2 Water Bottles, Tap Water & Drinking Fountains ..... 6
  - 2.3 Plastic Bags ..... 6
  - 2.4 Coffee Makers and Keurig’s ..... 7
  - 2.5 Hosting Meetings & Catering ..... 8
  - 2.6 Single Use Items for Accessibility ..... 9
  - 2.7 Disposal of Unavoidable Items..... 10
  
- 3. Compliance & Communication** ..... 11
  
- 4. References**..... 11



# 1. Background

## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to encourage a reduction in the purchase, use, and disposal of single-use items across the corporation. By reducing single-use items, employees across all departments will help to minimize the County's environmental impact and improve the sustainability of the corporation.

With the support of County Council, this strategy will be used as a guideline to help reduce single-use items at the corporate level. This strategy is not a policy or a ban, but rather it is to be used as a resource guide to suggest alternatives to the items that are currently being used.

## 1.2 Single-Use Items

Single-use or disposable items are products and materials that are designed to be used once and then thrown away. These items are most commonly made of plastic or foam, however they can also include paper materials. Some common single-use items include:

- Plastic straws and cutlery,
- Disposable beverage cups, including plastic, polystyrene foam, and lined paper cups,
- Drinking cup lids,
- Plastic shopping bags, and
- Takeout containers.

## 1.3 Environmental Impact

Single-use items are used daily. Due to the affordability, convenience, and durability of these materials, (particularly those made of plastic), their use has increased. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the generation of more waste, which has a negative impact on the environment.

This is particularly concerning with single-use plastics, which are difficult to recycle and take years to breakdown. As a result, plastics are one of the main sources of litter in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019). Every year in Canada approximately 3.2 million metric tonnes of plastic is discarded. Of this amount, only 9% is recycled. The remaining 91% ends up in landfills (86%), incinerators (4%), and as unmanaged waste (ie. litter) in the environment (1%) (ECCC, 2019).

Although only 1% of plastics end up as litter, a 2018 shoreline clean-up found and removed over 116,000 kg of plastic material from coastal regions across Canada. Some of the most commonly found items included single-use plastics, including food and beverage containers, plastic bottles, bags, and straws, as well as smaller plastic particles that had begun to break down (Ocean Wise & WWF, 2018).

Despite the convenience of single-use items, it is important to take action to eliminate or reduce the use of these materials before they are disposed of.

## 1.4 Guiding Principle

It is important that the County of Huron takes action to reduce single-use items, especially when it may be unnecessary or avoidable. The benefits of doing this include:

- Showing our leadership and commitment to improving the sustainability of the corporation,
- Lowering the amount of waste generated across County facilities, thereby reducing management and disposal fees,
- Potentially reducing the amount of money spent on single-use items, if replaced with long-lasting reusable alternatives, and
- Being proactive in preparing for future policies imposed at the federal and provincial level.

With this in mind, the overarching principle guiding this strategy is: *When there exists a feasible alternative, the Corporation of the County of Huron will do its part to eliminate the unnecessary use of single-use items by purchasing and using more environmentally sustainable options.*

## 1.5 Objectives

The objectives of the Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy include:

- Being a leader and showing our corporate commitment to environmental sustainability,
- Raising awareness among County staff about the need to take action to reduce single-use items,
- Eliminating the unnecessary use of single-use items from corporate operations and services, as well as meetings and events,
- Replacing single-use items with reusable or recyclable alternatives when feasible, and
- When unavoidable, doing our best to minimize the use of single-use items and ensure proper disposal.

# 2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to encourage County staff across all departments, to eliminate and/or reduce the use of single-use items. Staff are encouraged to apply these recommendations whether they are at the workplace or working from home. The priority should always be on eliminating these items when it is feasible to do so.

This is not a comprehensive list for the corporation, however it is intended to reflect common areas of concern where there is an opportunity to improve.

## 2.1 Cutlery & Dishware

Cutlery and dishware are items that are used on a daily basis by County staff for meetings and events, as well as in offices and lunchrooms. While some departments have already made the switch to reusable items, others still rely on disposable options. There are several recommendations outlined below that may be useful in eliminating and/or reducing the use of these items across the corporation.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Eliminate the use of disposable cutlery and dishware, especially in offices and lunchrooms, where reusable options can be brought to work by employees or purchased for use by the department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider <b>purchasing kitchen items</b> for the department from secondhand stores, such as Goodwill. Often times these stores have good quality and affordable items.</li> <li>When employees <b>clean out their kitchens at home</b>, have them bring in any cutlery and dishware that are still in usable condition for the department to use</li> </ul>
2	For meetings and events ask employees to bring their own cutlery and dishware, reducing the need to purchase and use disposable items.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request that staff <b>bring their own items</b> when the meeting invitation is sent out. You may also send a reminder a few days before, to ensure they remember to bring their items from home.</li> <li>If your department frequently has staff meetings or potlucks, <b>suggest that employees bring a set of dishware from home to leave at the office</b>. This will reduce the likelihood of staff forgetting their items on the day of the event.</li> </ul>
3	When hosting a meeting/event at another facility, try to make use of any reusable cutlery and dishware that may be available at the location. Alternatively, before considering disposable options, it would be recommended to bring any reusable items from your own department.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider hosting meetings/events at <b>locations that have reusable cutlery and dishware</b>, as well as the facilities to clean these items after use. See section 2.5 Hosting Meetings &amp; Catering for more information.</li> <li>If your department has a set of reusable dishware, consider <b>purchasing totes to transport the items</b> to and from the meeting.</li> <li>If you are responsible to wash the items, consider <b>taking turns to share the workload</b>. Alternatively, try to make this a fun, team-building exercise that allows you to <b>work together</b>. Remember that “many hands make light work”.</li> <li>When hosting public meetings, there may be additional health and safety considerations. In this situation, you may <b>consider hosting meetings at locations that have commercial kitchens</b>, including the Courthouse and Jacob Memorial Building. If disposable items are the only option, <i>refer to section 2.7 Disposal of Unavoidable Items for further recommendations</i>.</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Water Bottles, Tap Water, & Drinking Fountains

Water is consumed in a variety of ways every day in County facilities. Some of the ways that water is consumed by both staff and the public, are more environmentally sustainable than others. The recommendations below suggest ways that County departments can make changes to avoid using single-use items for drinking water.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Tap water should be the first choice for County employees, when there is access to it. Unless there is an absolute need (ie. where there is no tap), water coolers and jugs should be avoided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your department prefers <b>filtered water</b>, consider purchasing a Brita water pitcher for the office.</li> <li>Encourage one another to use <b>refillable water bottles</b> to minimize the use and disposal of plastic bottles.</li> </ul>
2	Explore the feasibility of installing drinking water fountains and/or water bottle refill stations in public facilities. When feasible, single-use plastic bottles should be avoided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Sell reusable water bottles</b> for the public to use.</li> <li>If necessary, <b>consider selling water in cans</b>, as opposed to plastic bottles. This is already being done at the Huron County Museum.</li> <li><b>Remove disposable cups</b> (ie. Dixie cups) for public use and encourage refillable bottles. If required for accessibility, see section 2.6 Single-Use Items for Accessibility.</li> </ul>

## 2.3 Plastic Bags

Plastic bags are used in some facilities, particularly those that are visited by the public and tourists. It is important to reduce the use of these items across the corporation, especially considering that plastic bags are one of the most common items found on Canadian shorelines. The following recommendations offer alternatives to the plastic bags that are currently being used.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Avoid the use of disposable bags by encouraging the public to bring their own reusable options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If not already doing so, <b>consider selling reusable bags</b> for the public to purchase and use. There is also an opportunity to use these bags for advertising.</li> <li>Raise awareness by posting signs, sending an email, etc. to <b>encourage the public to bring their own bags</b> before visiting the facility.</li> </ul>
2	When feasible, purchase and use paper bags instead of plastic ones, and always encourage the reuse of bags for multiple purposes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paper should be purchased and used instead of plastic, as <b>paper is more likely to be recycled</b> and breaks down faster in the environment.</li> <li>Regardless of the type of bag, <b>reuse should always be encouraged</b> before disposal. Using items for their full lifecycle helps keep waste out of landfills, and reduces the creation of new materials using virgin resources.</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Coffee Makers & Keurig's

Coffee is a beverage that many people enjoy on a daily basis. Unfortunately, brewing coffee often uses disposable items and generates waste. The recommendations below offer simple suggestions that may be helpful in encouraging County staff to reduce the use and disposal of single-use items for coffee.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Purchase and use a regular coffee pot in the office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggest having an <b>office champion</b> (ie. the first person who arrives each morning) that volunteers to make coffee.</li> <li>• In order to be courteous, have a rule that the <b>coffee pot is never left empty</b>. If you take the last cup, make more for others to enjoy.</li> <li>• Encourage each other to consider <b>alternative coffee brewing methods</b>, such as a French Press, which doesn't require disposable filters.</li> </ul>
2	If Keurig's are already being used, consider using reusable K-cups instead of disposable ones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a department, consider purchasing reusable K-cups to share. <b>Reusable K-cups</b> are often an affordable and long-lasting alternative to disposable pods.</li> <li>• <b>Be aware of greenwashing</b>. Many K-cups are labelled as recyclable, however depending on the waste management provider, these materials will not meet the criteria to be recycled. <i>Refer to section 2.7 Disposal of Unavoidable Items for more information.</i></li> </ul>
3	When possible, County employees should bring their coffee in a reusable travel mug to work, or enjoy it in a mug at the office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage one another to <b>avoid waste from disposable coffee cups</b>. Not only is this better for the environment, but it will also likely save money.</li> </ul>

## 2.5 Hosting Meetings & Catering

The County frequently hosts meetings internally with employees, as well as externally with other organizations and the public. Often these events involve supplying food and beverages, which can generate waste from plastic packaging and disposable dishware. It's important that we take steps as a corporation, to show our leadership by reducing the environmental impact of the events that we are responsible for.

There are several recommendations listed below that outline steps we can take when organizing meetings and events, to ensure we minimize the use and disposal of single-use items.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Host meetings and events at locations that have reusable cutlery and dishware, as well as the facilities to clean the items after use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before booking a venue, <b>ask whether they have reusable items</b> that can be used.</li> <li>• <b>Choose a location that offers these services</b> and has already been used by the County for meetings and events.</li> </ul>
2	When catering is required, ask that they try to avoid using and/or bringing single-use items, including plastics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before booking a caterer, <b>make them aware of our corporate goal of minimizing disposable items</b> at meetings and events. Often, caterers are willing to accommodate this request to the best of their ability.</li> <li>• Similar to choosing a venue, <b>select a caterer that is able to accommodate these requests</b> and has been used for past County events.</li> </ul>
3	If providing any additional snacks and refreshments at the meeting, try to avoid single-use items that may be unnecessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>When booking a caterer or venue, ask if they supply additional items</b>, such as milk, cream, sugar, and coffee. This will avoid us having to purchase items that may be intended for single-use.</li> <li>• <b>Purchase a full carton of cream or milk</b>, instead of using single serve items. Smaller plastic materials tend to interfere with recycling processes, and as a result are diverted to landfills.</li> <li>• If purchasing fruits/vegetables or other snacks, <b>try to avoid items that are packaged in plastic.</b></li> </ul>



## 2.6 Single-Use Items for Accessibility

There may be instances when single-use items cannot be avoided, especially if they are required for accessibility or health and safety. This may include items such as bendable straws, water bottles, and those used for medical or sanitary purposes. When this is the case, the County should try their best to reduce the unnecessary use of these items and when possible, switch to more environmentally sustainable options.

The recommendations below offer suggestions for departments that may be required to use or supply single-use items for accessibility or health concerns.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	When single-use items are required, try to reduce the use of these materials by only providing them when they are necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, <b>keep single-use items out of sight</b>, such as behind a counter or desk. This allows an individual to request an item if needed, and avoids the unnecessary use of these materials for convenience.</li> <li>• Always <b>encourage staff to use reusable items</b> from home, or those that are supplied by the department before using disposable alternatives.</li> </ul>
2	When feasible, replace single-use items with more environmentally sustainable options that are reusable or recyclable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always <b>explore affordable alternatives</b> to the single-use items currently being used.</li> <li>• <b>Priority should be given to reusable items</b>, followed by those that are recyclable (ie. recyclable plastic, paper or metal). Items that are landfilled should be chosen last, when possible.</li> <li>• Consider purchasing a <b>Zero Waste Box from TerraCycle</b> for single-use items that cannot be recycled through regular waste collection (ie. latex gloves, pens and markers, etc.).</li> <li>• <b>Be aware of greenwashing.</b> Items that are labelled as compostable/biodegradable may not be the better option. Often these items take a long-time to breakdown and are not accepted in regular waste collection. Always do your research and consider the pros/cons before purchasing. You may consider:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The end use of the material,</li> <li>◆ The rate the material breaks down, and</li> <li>◆ How and where the material is disposed of.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## 2.7 Disposal of Unavoidable Items

When single-use items cannot be avoided, it is important that they are disposed of correctly. This can be challenging, as waste streams are complex and always changing. It is important to be aware of the waste systems we rely on, in order to ensure we are doing our best to use items that can be recycled. For this, there is one recommendation that is outlined below.

	Recommendation	Tips for Implementation
1	Know who the waste management provider is for your department, and make sure to stay up to date with the materials they accept for recycling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Always <b>consider whether an item can be recycled</b> by the service provider, before purchasing.</li><li>• <b>Have an office champion</b> that volunteers to regularly check the service provider’s website for changes to the items they accept.</li><li>• <b>Take advantage of composting/green bin programs</b> if they are offered by the service provider</li></ul>

As a reminder, many single-use plastic items are accepted in recycling streams. This can be confusing, as it is often recommended that these types of materials should be avoided. The ability of a plastic to be recycled depends on several variables, including the requirements of the service provider, the type and quality of plastic, the capability of the recycling facilities, as well as the larger global market.

If ever in doubt, follow the above recommendation and check with the waste service provider. Generally, it is accepted that higher quality plastics, those that are rigid and clear (ie. PET, HDPE, and PP) are more valuable and have a greater chance of being recycled. Lower quality plastics, such as those that are flexible and coloured (often black), are not as valuable and therefore are not as readily recycled (Metro Vancouver, 2019).

With that said, due to the larger environmental impacts that plastics have, as a corporation we should do our best to eliminate the use of these items, and transition to long-lasting, reusable alternatives when it is feasible.

# 3. Compliance & Communication

The Single-Use Item Reduction Strategy relies on voluntary compliance. This strategy is intended to encourage County staff across all departments to begin taking action to reduce single-use items and improve the sustainability of the corporation.

Although this will not be enforced, with the support of County Council, this has been endorsed as a goal for the corporation. We need to work together to encourage one another to show our leadership and take action.

The Conservation Committee will support the corporation by helping communicate awareness and related information. Through posts on CountyNet, as well as materials distributed across departments, we will work to support ongoing changes to ensure the success of this strategy.

Some of the ways the Conservation Committee plans to do this, include:

- Awareness posts on CountyNet, such as educating staff on proper waste disposal practices,
- Sharing initiatives and successes across departments, and
- Providing regular updates to staff and Council about the progress being made.

# 4. References

Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) (2019). Economic Study of the Canadian Plastic Industry, Markets and Waste: Summary Report to Environment and Climate Change Canada. Retrieved from [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2019/eccc/En4-366-1-2019-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/eccc/En4-366-1-2019-eng.pdf).

Government of Canada (2019). Government of Canada actions on plastic waste in federal operations. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/greening-government/government-canada-actions-plastic-waste-federal-operations.html>.

Metro Vancouver (2019). Single-Use Item Reduction Toolkit. Retrieved from [http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/solid-waste/SolidWastePublications/Single-Use\\_Item\\_Reduction\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/solid-waste/SolidWastePublications/Single-Use_Item_Reduction_Toolkit.pdf).

Ocean Wise & WWF (2018). Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup: 2018 Annual Report. Retrieved from <https://www.shorelinecleanup.ca/storage/resources/gcsc-2018annualreport-190416.pdf>.