



## Why be our ‘Plastics Reduction Partner’?

Management and disposal of solid waste material, especially plastics, has become one of the most challenging environmental problems of our time. Over the past 30 years, as a global population we have exponentially increased our use of plastics. Though plastics have been crucial for progress in some vital arenas (e.g., medicine, laboratories, etc.), many single-use plastics – particularly packaging – offer less vital benefits and have the shortest life-cycle of any plastics at only 0.5 years, yet they make up over 40 percent of primary plastics produced at 146 million tons annually.<sup>1</sup> This mostly linear ‘take, make, waste’ economy from the overconsumption of single-use plastics and the accumulation of pollution from this wasteful way of eating, drinking, and packaging poses increasing hazards to our natural environment.

To understand the scale of the problem, a global analysis of plastic production published in 2017 concluded “between 2002 and 2015 we made the exact same amount of plastic that we made between 1950 and 2002.” According to the United National Environmental Programme (UNEP) between one to five trillion single-use plastic bags are used each year, and over one million single-use plastic bottles are purchased every minute!<sup>2</sup> According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 98 percent of plastic packaging (e.g., bottles) is produced from virgin feedstock from finite resources like oil. At current production and pollution rates, annual flows of plastics into the ocean would nearly triple by 2040 to 29 million metric tons (MT) equivalent per year, and open burning of plastic waste would double to 2.1 GT of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.<sup>3</sup> The Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) found that plastic production and incineration add more than 850 million MT of greenhouse gas (GHG) to the atmosphere. That is equivalent to the pollution from 189 new 500MW coal-fired power plants! On the current trajectory of plastic production and use, 1.34 gigatons (GT) of greenhouse gases will be emitted per year by 2030. By 2050, CIEL projects the production and disposal of plastics could generate over 56 GT per year, constituting up to 14 percent of our entire remaining global carbon budget.

Though supporting sustainably-sourced reusables for refill is the best fiscal and environmentally resource responsible strategy available – even other single-use items could offer better alternatives. Unlike aluminum and glass, plastic is not endlessly recyclable, and over the decades it has shown it simply is not recycled at as high of rates as aluminum, glass, paper, or cardboard – at the bin or at recycling facilities. Plastics also never truly go away they simply break down into smaller pieces, with those less than five millimeters called ‘microplastics.’ They pass unchanged through waterways into the ocean and aquatic life and birds can mistake microplastics for food. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), “plastic is the most prevalent type of marine debris found in our ocean and Great Lakes.” One million wildlife species are currently threatened with extinction. 33 percent of marine mammals are at risk, as well as 33 percent of coral species, and one of the main reasons for this extinction crisis is pollution, including plastic pollution in our oceans. The ingestion of plastic kills one million marine birds and 100,000 marine animals each year.<sup>4</sup> **The time to act is now.**

<sup>1</sup> Geyer, R., Jambeck, J. R., & Law, K. L. (2017). *Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made*. *Science Advances*, 3(7), e1700782.

<sup>2</sup> UNEP (2018). *Single-use plastics: A Roadmap for sustainability*. Nairobi, UN Environment / Osaka, International Environmental Technology Centre.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts, & SYSTEMIQ. (2020). *Breaking the Plastic Wave: Top Findings for Preventing Plastic Pollution* (p. 78). Pew Charitable Trusts.

<sup>4</sup> IPBES (2019): Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, and H. T. Ngo (editors). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1148 pages. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673>



## Plastics Reduction Partner: Commitment Letter

We recognize it is time for a change in strategy. Instead of the antiquated strategy of simply focusing on individual behavior change ‘at the bin,’ we instead will focus on what we bring to campus in the first place. By purchasing less, as well as pivoting to better alternatives like durable reusables, and single-use items with proven waste diversion results and sustainable sourcing we will support a shift from linear to circular economies. We will add our institution to the list of universities and organizations calling for climate action and pollution reduction.

### Our campus is committed to:

- Reduce the purchase and use of single-use plastics in their campus daily operations.
- Educating and building awareness among students, faculty, and staff about campus-wide plastics reduction efforts, with a special emphasis on new students and employees.
- Providing opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to engage in campus-wide plastics reduction efforts to support long-term behavior change.
- Demonstrating institutional leadership to reduce the purchase and use of single-use plastics on campus; and regularly evaluating and taking steps to improve current strategies.

\_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ is ready to act.

Today, \_\_\_\_\_, we commit to become a National Wildlife Federation Plastics Reduction Partner.

After reviewing the Plastics Reduction Partner workbook, we highlight the following priority action items, among others from Category I-IV that we will pursue:

*Chose 'top two' actions items (among others you will pursue) from each category's drop down menu, as a show of commitment for the next three-year evaluation cycle.*

Category I.	1.
	2.
Category II.	1.
	2.
Category III.	1.
	2.
Category IV.	1.
	2.

Through these and other sustainability efforts, **our aim<sup>5</sup>** is that by the end of the three-year evaluation cycle we will submit our results in the Plastics Reduction Partner workbook for the **(check one)**:

<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Bronze Certification</b>	<i>Introductory level – as we are newer to the plastics reduction space but committed to getting the word out about the need for change.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Silver Certification</b>	<i>Intermediate level – as we are committed to reducing plastics in practice and making an impact that is visible campus-wide.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Green Certification</b>	<i>Advanced level – as we are institutionally committed to demonstrate leadership in the plastics reduction space as a true change agent.</i>

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title, Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Secondary Signature (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title, Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

The Plastics Reduction Partner Certification is a program of National Wildlife Federation, the Campus Race to Zero Waste is a supporting partner. The National Wildlife Federation is one of over 2,500 organizations working on the #breakfreefromplastic global movement and a proud partner of Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). We have collaborated with AASHE to ensure that participating universities are eligible for STARS' Innovation credit.



#breakfreefromplastic



<sup>5</sup> Aim, or what level your institution is hoping to achieve within the three-year evaluation period. If your institution qualifies early or for a different level, this program is flexible enough to award recognition earlier or at a different level than originally stated here. Awards will be based on the data and documentation submitted for review. New data and documentation should be submitted every three years from the date of signing to remain current, and a new letter of commitment is required every three years with outlined action steps to remain current. Please refer to the workbook and guide for more information.