



Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Students Seek to Ban Plastic Water Bottles from Campus

Zero waste by 2020—that’s one of the goals of the UC Office of the President’s Sustainability Practices Policy for all UC campuses. Several students at UC San Diego’s Student Sustainability Collective (SSC) are working to make that a reality.

Michael Mnatsakanian, a fifth-year chemical engineering major, minoring in environmental studies, is helping to direct SSC’s All Campus Plastic Water Bottle Ban at UC San Diego. He and other students believe that completely eliminating the sale of disposable plastic water bottles on campus is the only way to achieve zero waste by 2020.

“We want to ban the sale of plastic water bottles because plastic is the No. 1 threat to marine ecosystems,” said Mnatsakanian. “Bottled water plants negatively affect surrounding communities, and annual purchases of bottled water are 2000 times more expensive than using tap water. On top of that, tap water has significantly lower rates of potentially damaging substances.”

Currently, the students are working to pass the Vendor Lease Agreement, which would eliminate the sales of plastic bottles upon a campus vendor’s lease renewal. They are also working with [Aquaholics Anonymous](#), a student organization supporting water conservation, to create an interactive map of hydration stations as well as collecting data to make pointed recommendations of where the next stations should be placed.

The ban on plastic water bottles isn’t the first campaign aimed at decreasing their presence on campus. “Breaking the Plastic Habit” was an SSC campaign in 2011 that pledged to eliminate the sale of plastic water bottles in dining halls and resulted in the installation of the first 10 hydration stations on campus.

It’s not just a campus initiative either. The All Campuses Plastic Water Bottle Ban campaign plans to implement lasting policy not only at UC San Diego, but all UC campuses.

“Thanks to years of working with campus administration, UC San Diego Plastic Water Bottle Ban campaign leaders now have the expertise to teach student environmentalists at other campuses how to implement changes,” said Mnatsakanian.

One of the places they are doing that is at [Powershift](#), a conference for advocacy in social justice. During this year’s event, Mnatsakanian directed Student Sustainability Collective leaders from campuses around the country about bypassing initiatives and aiming straight for policy changes.

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