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Chico State goes plastically strawless

- *Plastic straws banned but paper straws OK*
- *"A straw that you use for less than 10 minutes is here for 200 years"*

As of today, April 23, California State University, Chico, is banning the use of plastic straws on campus. It says it's the first California State University campus to eliminate plastic straws.

Paper straws, with a thin coating of beeswax, will be offered instead.

There may not be a more ubiquitous single-use item than a plastic straw, explain the proponents of this change. But toss a

plastic straw into the trash, and it'll eventually sit in the landfill for hundreds of years. Place it in recycling, and it'll still end up in the landfill because it's made from a type of polypropylene plastic that recycling programs won't accept.

"A straw that you use for less than 10 minutes is here for 200 years," says Corinne Knapp, associate dining director of Associated Students Dining Services. "Something we just use and throw away, we took resources from this earth for 10 minutes of use, sometimes even less."

Associated Students Dining Services controls and maintains dining sites across campus, including three convenience stores (Butte Station, Holt Station, and Urban Roots), two coffee shops (Common Grounds and Selvester's Café-by-the-Creek), and the restaurants in the BMU Marketplace, as well as residential dining in Sutter Hall.

Between all of them, 130,000 plastic straws are used every academic year.

The hope is this change will make a dent, however small, in the 500 million plastic straws used (and discarded) in this country daily.

Every year Ms. Knapp listens to suggestions from sustainability-minded students, particularly the elected AS sustainability officer, of how to cut waste, improve environmentally conscious practices, and reduce the carbon footprint at various campus locations. Last year, the elimination of plastic straws was suggested.

“We try to work with those students to try to achieve those ideas that are feasible,” Ms. Knapp says. “And when this one came up, it was like, ‘Yeah, I think we can do that.’”

Right around that time, a Chico-based group of environmentally minded citizens, led by Linda Storey, owner of Hula’s Chinese Bar-B-Q, was leading the charge for local restaurants to go strawless. Looking to hit the campus population, the group

reached out to the university's associate dining director Elaine Kramer, who saw this as an opportunity to honor Chico State's core value of sustainability.

"The timing was perfect," Ms. Kramer says.

With its built-in audience of dining service consumers, AS Dining seized the opportunity to make any effort of eliminating plastic straws on campus its own, and it came up with alternatives. While anyone can use their reusable drink containers for coffee or soft drinks (along with a 20-cent discount), paper straws coated with beeswax (for added durability) will also be available upon request.

Additionally, stainless steel straw kits (including straw, cleaning brush, and sticker) will be available at multiple points of sale across campus beginning April 23 for $1.25 each. By offering alternatives, instead of banning straws altogether, they hope to best serve their customers while still making a difference, Ms. Knapp says.

Ms. Kramer hopes the awareness created around the strawless campaign will lead to positive action away from campus.

“I think this is a great place to start, I’m hoping this will progress,” she says. “We’ll start at straws and hopefully someday we get all the way to the cup.”