

VIRGINIA GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER 77

"VIRGINIA LEADING BY EXAMPLE TO REDUCE PLASTIC POLLUTION AND SOLID WASTE"

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ'S)

1. What is Executive Order 77 (EO77)?

Virginia Tech answer: [Executive Order 77](#), issued by Virginia Governor Ralph Northam on March 23, 2021, mandates all state institutions, including higher education, to stop buying, selling, and distributing specific single-use plastic items (disposable plastic bags, single-use plastic and polystyrene food service containers, plastic straws and cutlery, single-use plastic water bottles) by July 21, 2021, and to develop an implementation plan to reduce overall compensation of non-medical single-use plastic and solid waste by December 31, 2025.

2. Why was the EO77 issued?

Virginia Tech answer: Governor Northam signed the Executive Order to reduce the state agency consumption of single-use plastics and the amount of waste bound for the landfill.

3. What is a single-use plastic?

Virginia Tech answer: A single-use plastic is a disposable plastic item that is intended to be used once and then thrown away.

4. Are there immediate impacts to Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension?

Virginia Tech answer: There were several categories of single-use plastics that were designated through the EO77 for immediate cessation from purchase and distribution. However, the EO77 also allowed Virginia Tech to request an extension to December 31, 2022 for this short-term cessation requirement. Consequently, **the only immediate impact is an obligation by the University (all departments and locations) to no longer purchase or distribute polystyrene (Styrofoam) food containers by July 21, 2021.** The other single-use plastic categories specifically mentioned in EO77 for immediate cessation will be extended to December 31, 2022.

5. What about the expected impact to Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension regarding other single-use plastic items?

Virginia Tech answer: While immediately discontinuing the use of single-use plastics would be the ideal route, the logistics involved make it near to impossible. Certain single-use plastics will take longer to discontinue than others, so the plan is to be mostly free of single-use plastics by December 31, 2025. Virginia Tech is moving at the most efficient sustainable pace in order to meet the goals outlined in EO77.

6. How do Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension departments comply with EO77 July 21, 2021 cessation requirement?

Virginia Tech answer: The university is committing to the July 21st cessation of purchase and distribution **of polystyrene (Styrofoam) food containers only**; the university will accept the option of an extension

on cessation of the other five categories (plastic cutlery, plastic straws, plastic food containers, plastic bags and single use water bottles) until December 31, 2022. While we don't believe the extended cessation categories are heavily purchased by most departments on campus, if your department has purchased these items in the past, you should plan to discontinue purchasing new quantities to ensure depleting inventories by December 31, 2022 and instead move to an alternative product. Alternatives include reusable washable items, paper-based items, bamboo, and compostable.

7. How will the Commonwealth ensure that Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension as well as other agencies are complying with EO77?

Virginia Tech answer: The [Commonwealth's Department of Environmental Quality \(DEQ\)](#) will manage a system of yearly progress reports to ensure that all state agencies are on track.

8. Are single-use products currently owned by Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension going to be thrown out?

Virginia Tech answer: No, the remaining inventory of single-use products should be used. A critical requirement of EO77 is to exhaust the institution's current inventory of single-use plastics while working to transition to new alternatives.

9. Will there be state issued guidelines throughout the Cessation process?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, on June 21, 2021 the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issued additional implementation guidance with additional guidance and updates expected annually.

10. I am not located on the main Blacksburg campus, does this still apply to me?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, this order applies to all Virginia Tech employees and university locations across the state including, but not limited to, agriculture research facilities and all Cooperative Extension facilities and offices.

11. Are there scenarios where the EO77 requirements may not apply?

Virginia Tech answer: In cases of public health, public safety, or when no viable alternative exists, extensions and exemptions may be requested. Exemptions do include single-use plastics used in lab settings or research related work.

12. Will single-use plastics still be utilized in maintaining an emergency supply of food/water in times of crisis?

Virginia Tech answer: While the campus aims to discontinue single-use plastics from its day-to-day operations, retaining supplies for emergency use will take priority whether or not they are single-use.

13. Are outside companies or contracted vendors going to get rid of plastic packaging also?

Virginia Tech answer: Private companies are not held to the standards of the Order, however they will be required to comply in alignment with the university's implementation of the executive order when providing applicable single-use plastic goods or services directly on campus. An example would be caterers who supply catered food, beverage and services to the university will comply with the polystyrene (Styrofoam) food container cessation on July 21, 2021. VT Procurement will be modifying any existing vendor contracts that need to come into compliance with EO77.

14. Will Student Organizations be included in the groups disallowed from single-use plastics?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes because the EO77 applies to all facets, departments, programs, and locations of all state agencies and state higher education facilities, EO77 requirements will also apply to Virginia Tech's student organizations as well. Additional guidance will be provided outlining the expectations of student organizations regarding minimizing their purchase and distribution of single use plastics. Because this is a phased out implementation plan, the emphasis will be on consistent reduction and looking for alternative products for student organization programs and events.

15. Will plastic prepackaged food and drinks be phased out as part of the Executive Order?

Virginia Tech answer: Prepackaged food will not be phased out, but the University will be working with the entities that provide the goods to explore alternatives in packaging that are safe for the campus.

16. Are single-use plastics used in a research environment exempt from EO77?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, single-use plastic items used for, or during, research activities are exempt.

17. Will bottle water from vending machines be affected as well?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, plastic bottles from vending machines fall under the criteria outlined in the order, and will be phased out but not immediately. As of today, water bottles are currently on course to be phased out by December 31st, 2022, while all other plastic bottles will be planned for a phase out by the Executive Order's deadline December 31st, 2025. We will continue to monitor this for updates from DEQ.

18. Am I allowed to bring my own plastic water bottles from home?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, anyone can bring plastic bottles from home, but it is highly encouraged to use a reusable bottle!

19. Will paper straws replace plastic ones?

Virginia Tech answer: Virginia Tech is currently exploring alternate options for plastic straws through the student-led Green RFP initiative. Paper straws and compostable cutlery will be trialed in Turner Place at Lavery Hall this upcoming school year. Students will be asked to provide feedback as part of the pilot.

20. Is plastic furniture a single-use plastic?

Virginia Tech answer: No, plastic furniture is not considered single-use plastic. A single-use plastic is meant to be used only once before it is disposed.

21. What are the alternatives to single-use plastic water bottles?

Virginia Tech answer: The most effective alternative to single-use plastic bottles is using refillable bottles at water fountains or refilling stations on campus.

22. Are souvenir cups from athletic events going to be phased out?

Virginia Tech answer: No, souvenir cups are considered reusable.

23. Will polystyrene pellets, plastic wrap, or any other kind of industrial plastic product be banned from use at Virginia Tech and Virginia Cooperative Extension?

Virginia Tech answer: Single-use plastic items with specific purposes such as plastic wrap that have no viable market alternative will be exempt from EO77.

24. Are bio-based plastics considered appropriate alternatives for single-use plastics?

Virginia Tech answer: Montgomery County does not have the means to compost bio-based plastics. As such, the University will look at other alternatives.

25. For the plastics to be phased out, alternatives are defined as either reusable, compostable or recyclable. Does this include recyclable plastics?

Virginia Tech answer: According to EO77, recyclable plastics are sufficient alternatives for single-use plastics except for certain and specific categories. The categories that are defined in EO77 as not being sufficient for a recyclable plastic alternative are: plastic cutlery, plastic straws, plastic food containers, plastic single use water bottles and plastic bags.

26. Has Virginia Tech done anything to work towards sustainable practices on campus?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, Virginia Tech is on track with its goal of becoming a waste-free campus by 2030, coinciding with the [Climate Action Commitment](#), Virginia Tech's framework for advancing sustainability and energy efficiency in campus operations, facilities, academics, research, and more. To learn more about the University's sustainability achievements and initiatives, please visit: <https://www.facilities.vt.edu/sustainability.html>

27. What about disposable plastic bags my department already has in inventory?

Virginia Tech answer: If applicable, departments on campus should cease to purchase disposable plastic bags in order to completely deplete existing inventories by December 31, 2022 (other than those specifically related to medical use, lab, or research needs). The current recommendations for alternatives are 1) to consider not providing a bag at all 2) utilize long term use bags (cloth, recycled materials, etc.) or 3) paper bags (free of any additive coatings).

28. Are trash bags considered single use plastic bags?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, trash bags are considered single use plastic bags but at this time, there are no other market alternatives to the traditional plastic trash bag or can liner. At this time the university has an extension to cessation of plastic bags until December 31, 2022. DEQ has indicated that more guidance relating to trash bags and several other categories will be forthcoming in the next few months.

29. Will promotional items like giveaways and swag be affected by EO77?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, if it is used once and then discarded it will fall under EO77. Departments should keep this in mind when they are planning events in the future, and choose promotional items that are reusable, compostable, or recyclable.

30. Will our caterers need to comply with EO77?

Virginia Tech answer: Yes, the University should use caterers under the America-To-Go Catering Concierge program. Those caterers will contractually need to adhere to the implementation standards of EO77 established by the University. If circumstances are such that an America To Go caterer cannot be utilized, it should be conveyed to the caterer that they should limit the use of single use plastics in providing the services to the university. Referring those types of vendors to this FAQ page would be a good way to convey the expectations of our third party vendors and service providers.