

Student Assembly

1 **Resolution 70: *The Last Straw: Single-Use Plastic*** 2 **Phaseout**

3 **Abstract:** Phasing out single-use plastics through a five-year transition to reusable or BPI-
4 certified compostable alternatives. Doing so would align campus practices with Cornell's
5 commitments to sustainability, environmental stewardship, and community well-being.

6 **Authored by:** Plastic Free Cornell, Lydia Blum '27

7 **Endorsed by:** Dylan Carson '28, Alexander Walters '28, Christian Tarala '27, Lani Lin-Kissick
8 '28, Aashay Mody '29, Samuel Lau '29, Madelyn Rhodes '27

9 **Reviewed by:** Environmental Committee, 03/01/2026

10 **Type of Action:** Recommendation, to be presented to the University Assembly and the Student
11 Governance Assembly

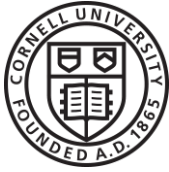
12 **Originally Presented:** 03/05/2026

13 **Current Status:** Adopted by the Assembly, Unanimous Consent, 04/09/2026

14 **Whereas,** Cornell's commitment to sustainability—demonstrated through initiatives such as the
15 world-renowned Atkinson Center—stands in stark contrast to the continued use of plastics that
16 contribute to severe environmental damage on this campus. The toxic chemicals commonly
17 found in plastic can take anywhere from [100 to 1,000 years](#) or more to decompose, and with [less](#)
18 [than 10% of plastic in the world](#) actually being recycled, [plastic waste continues to accumulate](#) at
19 an alarming rate in landfills and oceans,

20 **Whereas,** single-use plastic is actively detrimental to the health of the Cornell community.
21 [Microplastics](#) are increasingly being found in the brain, testes, heart, stomach, lymph nodes,
22 placenta, urine, breast milk, and semen, and are associated with adverse effects, including
23 cancers, diabetes, neurotoxicity, and reproductive toxicity,

24 **Whereas,** Cornell's commitment to building "A Community of Belonging" and "Changing
25 Lives through Public Engagement"—a pledge to serve "our community, our state, and the
26 broader world, learning about their needs and strengths, and applying the knowledge we create
27 for the benefit of society"—requires attention to the broader social impacts of plastic production
28 and waste. Plastic production and waste, particularly, threaten the health and livelihoods of low-
29 income communities. In the United States, predominantly African American and Indigenous
30 communities are vulnerable targets for [petrochemical corporations](#), which intentionally dump



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31 toxic waste from plastic production. [Water contamination](#) in these communities restricts access
32 to reliable drinking water, further contributing to illness and widening existing health disparities,

33 **Whereas**, a commitment to “Respect for the Natural Environment” and the goals of Cornell’s
34 research demand careful consideration of the ecological impacts of plastic use. Plastics harm
35 ecosystems in numerous ways. Plants exposed to [microplastic particles exhibit reduced growth](#)
36 due to stress, changes in chemical composition, disruptions in hormone regulation, and
37 reductions in photosynthesis through altered chlorophyll. Studies have also revealed that [1,557](#)
38 [species](#) across both marine and terrestrial environments ingest plastic, while [99% of marine](#)
39 [species contain microplastics](#), which can block digestive tracts and pierce internal organs,
40 causing animal mortality. Current research further confirms that microplastics damage animal
41 livers and cells and disrupt reproductive systems, threatening population growth,

42 **Whereas**, banning plastics can [save money](#) for the university in the long term due to lower
43 greenhouse gas emissions, reduced waste processing burdens, and other environmental and social
44 harms,

45 **Whereas**, Cornell’s [tap water quality is excellent](#), and healthier for bodies and ecosystems than
46 plastic-bottled water,

47 **Whereas**, the [SUNY system has banned single-use plastics](#). Cornell opting out of this policy to
48 avoid a ban on single-use plastics is shameful for an Ivy League university that prides itself on
49 sustainability,

50 **Whereas**, other colleges and universities, including the [University of Virginia](#), [University of](#)
51 [Colorado-Boulder](#), and the [University of California](#), have already phased out or are in the process
52 of phasing out single-use plastics, and some units within Cornell are already doing so, including
53 the Statler Hotel and several dining facilities,

54 **Whereas**, the student body has wanted to ban single-use plastics since 2010, including the
55 passage of a Student Assembly plastic bottle phase-out resolution, which was never
56 implemented,

57 **Be it therefore resolved**, Cornell University shall eliminate single-use plastics according to a
58 five-year phase-out program from the date a ban is passed,

59 **Be it further resolved**, where elimination is not practical, single-use plastic products will be
60 replaced with BPI-certified compostable products. The university may make specific, limited
61 exceptions for health, safety, and research where there are no existing alternatives,



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62 **Be it finally resolved,** Cornell will adhere to its stated values of sustainability and equality by
63 phasing out single-use plastics.

64 Respectfully Submitted,

65 Lydia Blum '27

66 College of Agriculture & Life Sciences Representative, *Student Assembly*

67 Dylan Carson '28

68 College of Arts & Sciences Representative, *Student Assembly*

69 Alexander Walters '28

70 LGBTQIA+ Representative, *Chief of Staff, Student Assembly*

71 Christian Tarala '27

72 Nolan School of Hotel Administration Representative, *Student Assembly*

73 Madelyn Rhodes '27

74 Environmental Committee Member, *Student Assembly*

75 Aashay Mody '29

76 Environmental Committee Member, *Student Assembly*

77 Samuel Lau '29

78 Environmental Committee Member, *Student Assembly*

79 Lani Lin-Kissick '28

80 Environmental Committee Member, *Student Assembly*