



Energy Blog

CAP OC Challenges YOU to Participate in the Zero Waste Week Challenge! (P 1 of 3)

This week's blog is written by Briana Ancona, the Climate Corps Fellow for CAP OC's Energy and Environmental Services department. They are an avid zero waste enthusiast and challenged the Energy and Environmental Services Department to participate in a Zero Waste Challenge.

Have you ever gone for a walk and taken in your surroundings, noticing the environment as you walk? Have you ever seen trash on the ground during your walk? Maybe it was a plastic candy wrapper, or maybe it was a broken plastic fork or even some plastic foil confetti. The reality is that there is much waste present in our environment, polluting our waterways, leeching chemicals and heavy metals into the ground, and leaving an impact that will outlive our lifetime. There have been many times I have felt great despair and existential dread when thinking about trash and waste. I think we all have. While it may feel impossible to do anything to avoid creating waste, there are many ways you can start reducing the amount of waste in your life.

I want to share a short story about my efforts to be less wasteful before challenging you to participate in your own Zero Waste Week Challenge.

It seems almost scripted the way my morning played out. About a month ago, I woke up to the smell of breakfast being cooked and the sound of cars searching for parking. It was Sunday, and every Sunday morning, the local high school hosts a

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swapmeet in its parking lot. Neighbors take advantage of the extra traffic to have their own yard sales. Our neighbor across the street was moving and had done so that Sunday morning. Being bored after having a large breakfast, my father and I walked over to my neighbor's driveway to see what treasures were hidden amongst small porcelain figures and odd knickknacks.

In my search, I found a pack of napkins with a floral pattern on them. They were very thin napkins and brown, which happens to be a color I like. I ended up with eight napkins by the end of my visit and five dollars less than I originally had.

I first started by placing four napkins in my glove box, so I could have some napkins for impromptu situations and could avoid using napkins when going out. I kept 3 on my person and would use them to hold my lunch. Day by day, I would make a conscious effort to always have a napkin on me because it was useful and less wasteful. This began to shift into me carrying cutlery as well to avoid using plastic cutlery at work.

And then, I began to keep Tupperware in my car in case there was ever a need to take leftovers home. These small changes have significantly reduced the number of take-out containers I use, the number of napkins I use both at home and when I am out, and the amount of plastic cutlery I use when I eat out.

Now I won't sit here and write that this process was easy and seamless. I definitely have used paper napkins because it was closer, and I was too lazy to grab my napkins. What mattered though was the effort made and the understanding that mistakes happen, and habits take time to form.

So now I challenge you to take on a Zero Waste Week challenge. What does this look like? The National Ocean Services writes out a few examples, such as replacing single-use plastic items (such as drink bottles, sandwich baggies, snack bags, spork packs, etc.) with reusable alternatives, using cloth napkins instead of paper ones, recycling and composting, replace plastic straws with paper straws or consider not using straw, or to power down your computers and other electronic devices when not in use.

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There are a million ways to reduce your waste, so take some time to sit back and think about what easy swaps you can make to avoid using more new items and inevitably, creating more waste. Being intentional and thoughtful with your actions may yield in some surprising results.

Sources:

(1) [Students for Zero Waste Week](#)