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Hundreds of UCSB Students Pledge to Can the Bottle Habit

"Rethink Your Thirst" event convinces hundreds to ditch the plastic and switch to sustainable containers

Santa Barbara, CA – Students at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) consume about 8,000 plastic water bottles per day on campus. This staggering number dropped by a few hundred in a matter of hours on January 26th. In response to an impressive 8 foot by 4 foot tower of plastic bottles—collected in just a few hours on campus—over **250** students, faculty, and staff pledged to kick their plastic water bottle habit in favor of a reusable canteen.

The "Rethink Your Thirst" event was staged by the Bren School Sustainability Committee (BSSC) as part of a nation-wide University event, RecycleMania. The BSSC is a student organization of the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UCSB and RecycleMania is a 10-week nationwide recycling and waste reduction competition with over 450 universities participating this year. This was the first year that UCSB took part in the competition.

In exchange for a disposable bottle or a signed pledge, passersby were given a coupon for a discounted reusable canteen at the University Bookstore. What is the effect of 250 people ceasing to purchase single-use bottles? Eliminating the production, transportation, and sale of over 45,000 plastic bottles saves 12,000 gallons of gasoline (54,000 pounds of greenhouse gases - the equivalent of taking 15 SUVs or 20 cars off the road for a year) and 1,875 pounds of plastic (which takes over 1,000 years to break down). And these numbers were calculated using only the actual signatures that were collected!

One student, exiting the bookstore with 3 new reusable canteens, tossed her nearly empty Aquafina® bottle onto the growing tower of plastic and proudly exclaimed, "I bought them for my entire family – you inspired me!" Comments and praise encouraged the rotating team of over 20 student volunteers to engage as many people as possible during the 6 hour event.

Want to do your part? View some astonishing water bottle facts and sign the pledge online at the BSSC's webpage <http://www2.bren.ucsb.edu/~bssc/website/index.html>. Think before you drink and tell your friends and family!

Useful environmental statistics about plastic water bottles.

- The global consumption of bottled water reached 154 billion liters (41 billion gallons) in 2004.
- The United States is the world's leading consumer of bottled water. In 2006, bottled water consumption in the US reached a record 8.3 billion gallons, 185 million gallons of which was imported. The total amount spent on bottled water was over \$11 billion.
- Americans throw away an estimated 3 million plastic bottles every day.
- Eight out of 10 plastic water bottles used in the U.S. – a total of 4 billion pounds per year – become garbage, ending up in a landfill or in one of the world's oceans where they pose a great risk to marine life, killing birds and fish which mistake garbage for food.
- Manufacturing the bottles requires 17 million barrels of oil annually. Pumping and processing, transportation, and refrigeration require another 33 million barrels of crude oil. The 50 million total gallons is enough fuel to run 3 million cars for a year - and generates more than 7 million tons of carbon dioxide.
- The bottle that takes just a few minutes to drink can take up to a thousand years to biodegrade.
- Tap water is more regulated than bottled water (60-70 percent of bottled water is unregulated), and there is no research that has shown that bottled water is safer or more "natural" than tap water. Further, many brands of bottled water (Pepsi's Aquafina and Coca-Cola's Dasani) are merely processed municipal tap water.

For more information on RecycleMania, visit the UCSB RecycleMania page at <http://www.as.ucsb.edu/asr/RecycleMania.html> or the national page at <http://www.recyclemaniacs.org>.

For more information on the BSSC and more statistics on water bottles, visit the BSSC webpage at <http://www2.bren.ucsb.edu/~bssc/website/index.html>.

Thanks to Associated Students Recycling (<http://www.as.ucsb.edu/asr/>), UCSB Sustainability (<http://sustainability.ucsb.edu/>), and the University Bookstore (<http://www.bookstore.ucsb.edu/>).

The Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is home to an interdisciplinary graduate program focused on environmental problem solving through the integration of science, management, law, economics, and policy. Offering both a professional Master of Environmental Science and Management degree and a Ph.D. track, the School's mission is to play a leading role in researching environmental issues, training scientists and environmental management professionals, and identifying and solving environmental problems around the world. It is ranked among the top four programs of its kind in the nation and is the only such program in the western United States. For more information, go to www.bren.ucsb.edu.

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