

# Certified Green Chapter Program Action Guide

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## Introduction

Hello and welcome again to the Certified Green Chapter Program at the University of Illinois! The CGCP is a brand-new program of the [Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment](#), the UI's center for sustainability-focused research and campus sustainability improvement. We are very excited to be working with you to increase the sustainability of Greek houses around our campus!

iSEE has been running the [Certified Green Office Program](#) for several years, and many offices from across campus have participated in order to make their workplaces friendlier places to our planet. We've also recently begun a similar program for [campus laboratories](#). Green Chapter is the newest addition to our programming, and we are counting on your participation to make it just as much of a success! There are over 50 Greek houses at UIUC, which represent a significant opportunity to reduce our community's eco-footprint in residential life.

This guide will be a comprehensive review of the four Required Actions necessary for all levels of certification in the program as well as the 23 Elective Actions, of which at least five must be completed to achieve CGCP certification. **Completion of five Elective Actions** will earn you Bronze level certification, **completion of 10 Elective Actions** will earn Silver level certification, and **completion of 15 Elective Actions** will earn Gold level certification. We've provided this guide so its resources will always be easily accessible, and that each house can complete the program at their own pace. If you have additional questions about how best to complete an action, feel free to contact iSEE at any time at [iseegreenoffice@gmail.com](mailto:iseegreenoffice@gmail.com). Happy greening!

# I. Required Actions

Prerequisites:

- 1) Select a Sustainability Ambassador to be the point of contact for sustainability efforts.
- 2) Use a minimum of 30% recycled copy paper only.
- 3) Turn off lights, monitors, and other unused devices on nights and weekends the majority of the time.
- 4) Offer at least one vegetarian (or vegan) option equivalent to a meat-based dish at every hosted event.
- 5) Make sure your house has — and uses — clearly labeled recycling bins on a regular basis.

These are the actions that are necessary for each participating chapter to complete, no matter what level of certification you are seeking — no exceptions!

The four Required Actions are:

1. Go paperless whenever possible. For example, send out electronic agendas for meetings instead of printing them.
2. Use a minimum of 30% recycled content paper when you have to print things.
3. Turn off lights in empty rooms whenever possible. Consider having someone designated to go around and turn out the lights at night.
4. Sign up for Recycling Service Pickup. Provide clearly labeled recycling bins for paper as well as bottles/cans.

## Instructions

### I. Required Action #1: Go paperless whenever possible.

It's estimated that the average American uses [680 pounds of paper](#) every year. Though this figure does include paper products like plates, cups, etcetera\*, a large portion of this is still surely paper used for printing, note taking, and educational or informational usages. Considering that it's now easier than ever to find alternative ways to distribute or record information, it's highly important to take advantage of this whenever possible.

Of course, we don't expect you to be able to dictate the individual behavior of every member of your house, as a ban on paper printing, note taking, and schoolwork would surely not be feasible. Instead, we suggest that you ask your members to consider trying to reduce their individual paper consumption whenever they can on their own terms, and limiting the amount of paper that is used for in-house activities and information distribution. A great example of this would be to send out electronic agendas for meetings instead of distributing paper copies.

Though switching up habits like these takes some time to get used to, there's benefits outside of the environmental ones. The less paper that is used in your house, the less mess and clutter it will cause — and the more money you will save!

*\* Though not a part of this required action, subbing out disposable kitchenware is an Elective Action, so please consider reducing ALL of your paper product usage — not just sheet paper!*

## **II. Required Action #2: Use a minimum of 30% recycled content paper when you have to print things.**

Printing documents will be absolutely necessary sometimes. Thankfully, reducing the environmental impact of the paper you do use isn't terribly hard. A major step towards doing so is purchasing paper made of a minimum of 30% recycled content, therefore reducing the number of trees cut down for your paper..

Here are available products from Office Depot and Staples:

- [Office Depot® EnviroCopy®](#) \$64.99 per case
- [Hammermill® Great White®](#) \$68.89 per case
- [Boise® Aspen®](#) \$65.99 per case
- [Staples® Business Executive](#) \$57.99 per case

Similar or identical products can also be found by searching “recycled content copy paper” on any other online retailer that sells copy paper, such as Walmart or Amazon. On the Office Depot and Staples websites, it is easy to narrow down search results for recycled content copy paper by checking the “Recycled” option in the specification columns.

Something to consider: Though only 30% recycled content is required for CGCP certification, you can get additional elective points by going up to either 50% or 100% recycled content — which is often only a few dollars more expensive per case than the 30%.

## **III. Required Action #3: Turn off lights in empty rooms whenever possible.**

Turning off lights in empty rooms should be a no-brainer — saving electricity will not only help the environment, but cut down on the cost of your house's power bills as well. Though your exact savings will vary by your type, wattage, and amount of light bulbs, even the most sustainable bulbs will save more energy when not in use. A good rule to follow is that if you're going to leave a room empty for longer than about thirty seconds to one minute, it's best to switch off the lights to conserve energy.

Of course, the worst thing is to leave a light on all night. Consider finding a volunteer, or a team of volunteers, to go around and turn off all the unneeded lights in the house at night before they go to bed. [Take a look at the template](#) created for the Certified Green Office Program for this duty. Creating a similar document may help with organizing your volunteers.

#### **IV. Required Action #4: Provide clearly labeled recycling bins for paper as well as bottles/cans.**

Most of us are probably well aware of the benefits of recycling: reduced raw material extraction, reduced energy consumption, less land and marine litter, and lower landfill usage, just to name a few. Recycling is one of the easiest and most basic actions we can take to be good stewards of the environment.

But despite the fact that pretty much everyone knows this, and most of us make an effort to recycle at least the most obvious things, recycling rates in the U.S. are shockingly low: only around 35% percent for everyday municipal solid waste. Part of the explanation for this statistic is lack of access to comprehensive recycling services, and another part is general ignorance on what materials should be going into recycling bins.

Thankfully, both Champaign and Urbana provide fairly comprehensive services. As long as you have a [Feed the Thing](#) receptacle (Champaign) or [U-Cycle](#) receptacle (Urbana), both cities will accept and sort a wide variety of materials. So, it's important that everyone in your house is aware of what these materials are. We would recommend sending the links to the acceptable materials web pages around to everyone, and making a sign to hang by your indoor recycling bins with this list. You can find the materials accepted by Feed the Thing [here](#), and by U-Cycle [here](#).

To achieve this action, make sure you have separate, well-labeled receptacles within your house for paper and bottles/cans. We would recommend either that other recyclables be taken directly to the bins outside, or collected in a third container.



*Photo Credit: Pixabay*

## II. Food & Dining Elective Actions

Food and dining is a major area of our lives that has a lot of potential for carbon reduction, which doesn't often get as much attention as turning out the lights or driving less, for instance. The electives that follow cut down on carbon by helping you to choose food products that simply use less carbon in their development and production, and that travel less miles to get to your plates.

### I. ***Elective Action #1: Start or continue a Meatless Monday program, where every Monday your chapter goes vegetarian for their meal options.***

Though it hasn't always been widely known, many of us are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that animal agriculture is one of the greatest drivers of global warming. This is largely because of the [huge amounts of energy](#) required to grow the crops fed to animals, though many other factors such as deforestation for grazing land, processing/distribution emissions and methane emitted by cows play a role as well. As such, becoming vegetarian (or even better yet, a vegan) has been [consistently listed](#) as one of the best ways to reduce one's personal carbon footprint. However, any amount of meat reduction in your diet makes a difference (especially reducing beef and other red meats, which require the most energy input). This is why we are asking all Green Chapters to consider participating in "Meatless Monday." All this requires is making sure that every meal served in the house on each Monday is vegetarian, and contains no meat or fish (eggs and dairy products are fine).

### II. ***Elective Action #2: Pledge to serve at least one meal a week using local fruits and vegetables.***

The main environmental advantage of using local produce is that these foods travel far less miles to get to your plate than most produce in a supermarket will. Whether the goods traveled by airplane, train, or truck, a significant amount of carbon is used to distribute non-local foods across the country. Generally, a local food item was grown no more than 100 miles away from where you bought it. Thankfully, we have plenty of options for local food around us here in Central Illinois.



*Photo Credit: Laura Schultz*

During the spring, summer, and fall months, three farmer's markets are regularly held, featuring locally grown produce and other products.

- [Urbana's Market at the Square](#), Saturday 7am-noon
- [Champaign Farmers' Market](#), Tuesday 3:30-6:30pm
- [Student Sustainable Farm Stand](#) on the Quad, Thursday 11am-4pm

A variety of local produce is also regularly sold at the Common Ground Co-op in Urbana. Find a willing group to make a weekly shopping trip to one of the markets or the Co-op, select some produce, and plan a meal for the house! You'll be surprised at how satisfying it will feel to eat a meal containing ingredients that you know *exactly* where they came from.

\*\*\*COVID 19 Updates: The difficulty of social distancing at farmers markets may make it unsafe to visit at this time. The Student Sustainable Farm has switched to [online ordering](#), and both the Champaign and Urbana markets have enforced the use of face masks, hand sanitizer, and other safety precautions.

### III. ***Elective Action #3: Plant a garden, as space allows.***

This might mean something as small as a windowsill of fresh herbs or as large as a raised bed for squash and melons. By producing even a small amount of food for your house to use yourselves, you'll be cutting the environmental impact of this food just about as far as it can go. You can't get any more local than food grown in your own backyard! (Or porch, windowsill, etc).

What you decide to grow will depend not only on the space you have available, but the attention your chapter members are willing to give it. Before deciding anything, make sure to have a meeting to gauge interest in a garden and coordinate potential gardeners. In addition, check with personnel in charge of the home before you start digging.

While covering even just the basics of vegetable and herb gardening in this guide alone would be challenging, here are some resources to get started on picking crops and the planting process. There is a wealth of information available on gardening on the Internet, and in books, so be sure to do your research!

- [10 Tips for a Successful Indoor Herb Garden](#)
- [13 Easy Herbs to Grow Indoors](#)
- [17 Tips for Starting Your Own Herb Garden](#)
- [How to Plant a Kitchen Herb Garden](#)
- [How to grow vegetables in raised bed gardens](#) (video)
- [The Basics: Gardening in Raised Beds](#)



Photo Credit: Pixabay

- [What to Plant in a Raised Bed](#)
- [Tips for a Raised Bed Vegetable Garden](#)

#### **IV. *Elective Action #4: Purchase fair trade/sustainably sourced coffee, tea, and chocolate for common use.***

So what exactly is fair trade? Though we probably all have at least a vague idea based on the name “fair trade” itself, not everyone really knows all that much about it. [According to the World Fair Trade Organization](#), “Fair trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade.” Simply, the main goal is to pay fair prices for products to their producers, and not just the big companies that sell them. Receiving fair prices is especially important for farmers and their communities in developing countries who have difficulties competing with subsidized farms, therefore bettering farmers’ living and working conditions.

This principle of fair prices alone is a great reason to purchase these products, but there’s an added bonus as well: they are often better for the environment. Fair trade certification is also meant to ensure the principles of ethical purchasing, one of which is protection and conservation of the environment. Though fair trade doesn’t necessarily equate to organic, the farmers who participate in fair trade programs are often the most likely to also farm organically. Keep in mind that though fair trade products are more expensive, there are good reasons for this — and the more of these products that we buy, the more common fair trade and sustainable practices will become!

Coffee, tea, and chocolate are some of the most common fair trade food products — you’re likely to be able to find at least one option to purchase at most grocery stores in the area (though the best places to look are probably the [Common Ground Co-op](#) and [Harvest Market](#)). And of course your options are almost limitless if you order from the internet. If you’re shopping in-store, keep in mind that there are three main fair trade certifications in the U.S. (Fair Trade USA, Fairtrade America, IMO Fair for Life), so not every product will have the same symbol. Other certifications focused on sustainability to keep an eye out for are Rainforest Alliance, Smithsonian Bird Friendly, USDA Organic, and UTZ Certified.

#### **V. *Elective Action #5: Commit as a chapter to stop eating red meat (one point for every five members who make the pledge).***

As discussed in Elective Action #1, all types of meat generate more carbon emissions and use more resources than plant-based foods, which is why becoming vegetarian or vegan is one of the single most effective ways to reduce your personal ecological footprint. It’s estimated that if our diets were shifted away from meat worldwide, we



could cut our per capita greenhouse gas emissions [in half](#). However, the production and consumption do far more damage to the environment — mainly, red meats such as beef and lamb. Beef is the single most harmful meat, because cows require a great deal of water, pasture land to feed, and emit carbon in the form of methane from their flatulence. These high demands, combined with the extreme inefficiency of calorie conversion from their meat (just 1% of a cow's feed becomes calories that people obtain by eating the cow), means that the growing global demand for beef is highly unsustainable. And though other red meats such as lamb and pork still don't have nearly as high impacts as beef, they still consume more resources than poultry or fish, making it the best kind of meat to cut out of your diet if you're not willing to go fully vegetarian, or if doing so isn't feasible for your dietary needs.

Plus, cutting red meat will save money and reduces your risk of heart disease, so there are plenty of personally beneficial reasons to do it besides the environment and animal welfare!

### III. Utility Conservation Elective Actions

Though utility use in one individual home is really just a tiny drop in the ocean of overall use, it is important to get into conservation habits. These habits set an example for others to follow, and by choosing to buy products that help save and use resources more efficiently, manufacturers know that conservation and the environment are important to those who buy their products. Not to mention that more often than not, these practices will save you a significant amount of money in the long run!

#### I. ***Elective Action #6: Pull down window shades in common areas during the daytime during cooling season, and pull them up during heating season.***

Did you know [that about 30%](#) of indoor heat comes from sunshine coming in the windows? As pleasant as the summer sunshine might be, blocking it out will go a long way to helping to cool your common rooms, with or without the air conditioning on. This is [especially helpful](#) for windows that face west and south, because these windows receive the most direct sunlight. Reducing your AC reliance is a major step for cutting back on your carbon footprint (and energy costs)! To go an extra mile, you might consider investing in blackout curtains to more fully block sunlight and naturally insulate your house.

Conversely, opening up your window shades to receive sunlight during the winter can help reduce the need for additional heating. Make sure to close them for the night though — otherwise, the office will probably be quite chilly in the morning.



Also, make sure your windows are all closed properly and have no leaks! Otherwise, it will certainly be difficult to stop the cold air seeping in.

## **II. *Elective Action #7: Put signage near light switches reminding people to turn them off when the room is empty.***

For many of us, it is a no-brainer to turn off lights in unoccupied rooms when we are in our own homes — why pay for electricity that we are not actively using? However, this practice doesn't always make the jump to public spaces, or semi-public shared spaces like your chapter houses. Maybe we feel uncomfortable turning off light switches in buildings we don't own, or maybe it just genuinely doesn't occur to us to do so when we aren't immediately responsible for the power bill. Whatever the reasoning, it doesn't make any more sense to leave on lights in empty rooms at your chapter house) than it does to leave the lights on in our parents' homes. One easy way to encourage your chapter to switch off the lights is to put up reminder signs to do so.

You can download iSEE's "Turn off the juice" signage [here](#). There are also tons of great printouts that are just an Internet search away — or, try your hand at designing your own!



*Photo Credit: iSEE*

You may be surprised at how big an impact these signs can make. Even little things can go a long way towards changing our behaviors to become more sustainable!

## **III. *Elective Action #8: Use LED bulbs wherever possible in your house.***

Keeping the standard types of lightbulbs straight can sometimes be a challenge, so here's a quick guide:

- **Incandescent bulbs:** The standard and most common light bulb throughout recent history. The light emitted from these bulbs is generated from heat. To do so, the bulb gives off about 95% of the energy it uses as heat, and uses just

the remaining 5% as light. While the average cost of each bulb is less than a dollar, [their life span](#) is only about 1,000 hours and generates ten times as much carbon emissions as the most efficient bulb.

- CFL bulbs: Short for compact fluorescent lamp, this was the first popular energy-saving bulb. They commonly have a spiral shape and have a more complicated light generating process: excited electrons bound to mercury atoms radiate light that become visible when it hits the bulb's fluorescent coating. One CFL bulb lasts about 6,000 hours and costs a few dollars.
- LED bulbs: LED stands for light-emitting diode, which is the light source in the bulb. LED bulbs use only about 10% of the energy of incandescent bulbs, while lasting for up to 50,000 hours and generating only 10% as much carbon. Because of this astounding efficiency, LED prices when they first hit the market were [quite high](#) (over \$100 for a single bulb), but can now be found for less than \$5 each.

Though an LED bulb is still noticeably more expensive than an incandescent bulb upfront, they are well worth the price when considering they will last many years as opposed to an incandescent bulb's matter of months. They use less electricity to last longer, emit less carbon, and operate at a lower cost. Plus, there aren't any toxic materials, [like mercury](#), in them. There is really no reason not to buy LED bulbs over incandescents or even CFLs anymore — unless you are just really fond of spending money on bulbs multiple times a year.



*Photo Credit: Pixabay*

So, double check what kind of bulbs the lights in your house are using, and if they're not already LEDs, stock up on LEDs to replace them when they burn out. It'll probably happen sooner than you think!

Note: Be sure not to put your burned out light bulbs in the recycling! Incandescent light bulbs cannot be recycled curbside in any circumstances — the only way to do so is to send them to services such as [Terracycle](#) that will take care of the complicated task of separating their parts. Aside from spending the money to collect and send these bulbs away, the only thing to do is put them in the trash. However, CFL bulbs CAN be recycled — but still not in your curbside recycling! CFL bulbs can be dropped off for recycling at many hardware or electric stores. In

Champaign-Urbana, the stores that will accept them are [Home Depot](#), [Lowe's](#), [Springfield Electric](#), and [Tepper Electric](#).

#### **IV. *Elective Action #9: Replace your existing shower heads with low-flow options.***

[According to the EPA](#), 17% of residential water usage comes from our showers. [In 1992](#), the U.S. government mandated that newly produced shower heads could not have a flow rate above 2.5 gallons a minute. While this was a great improvement over previous heads, which could use around 5 gallons a minute, even lower-flow options are available. The EPA issues the [WaterSense](#) label to shower heads that flow at 2 gallons a minute or less. Therefore, replacing your shower heads (whether they were made pre or post 1992), is a great way to reduce water usage without having to change your shower length (though of course, that always helps too).

While just half a gallon less a minute may not seem like much, these half-gallons add up over time. The EPA has also estimated that the average family saves over 2,500 gallons of water each year with a WaterSense labeled showerhead — so imagine how many gallons more it would save your house! It would also save a good deal of energy and carbon emissions, since a lot of energy is used by your water heater to heat the showers. And of course, this saves your house a good deal on both the water and electric bills too!

Low flow shower heads can be found at home improvement stores like Home Depot and Lowe's, big box stores like Walmart and Meijer, or from various retailers online.

## **IV. Waste Minimization & Recycling Elective Actions**

It's no secret that we have a waste problem worldwide. However, it's important to remember that we as Americans produce the most per capita: [on average](#), Americans produce 4.4 pounds of it a day which amounts to about 1,600 pounds per person per year. The global average, for comparison, is 2.6 pounds per person per day. As college students, you probably do better than this — [Boston College reports](#) that an average college student produces just 640 pounds of solid waste a year. However, there is still room for improvement, and a lot of waste flowing out of this campus, so it's still important to consider how all of us can even further reduce our waste. Though recycling tends to be the go-to practice, waste minimization is even more effective!

**I. *Elective Action #10: Make a shared set of reusable bags available for use when shopping.***

Plastic grocery bags are such a staple of shopping that it's hard to imagine a time when we didn't use them. There's definitely reasons why plastic bags are convenient for stores and shoppers: they're cheap, lightweight, don't take up much space, and pretty much constantly available. But as most things whose primary assets are inexpensiveness and convenience, they're also not all that great for the environment — which you're probably aware of. Some people argue that using reusable cloth bags isn't really any better because they require many times more energy to produce for a single bag, but the problems with plastic bags aren't limited to the many millions of gallons of oil needed to produce them each year. They are also much limited in their reuse, cannot be easily recycled, endanger animals and nature, and poison the ground when left to degrade over hundreds of years in a landfill. Check out [this list](#) of facts and statistics on the harms of both plastic and paper bags for more info.

Having reusable bags goes a long way to lessen many of these damages. Most only cost a few dollars, so purchasing a set available for anyone in your house to use is not a major investment. They can also hold a whole lot more items than a standard plastic grocery bag due to size and sturdiness, and won't clutter your house as much as plastic bags do! It might take some work to get into the habit of bringing and using reusable bags, but once that's achieved, you won't want to ever go back to plastic bags!

Some extra tips:

- Cloth bags aren't only good for groceries — bring them to any store that uses plastic bags no matter what they're selling!
- If you have an overabundance of plastic bags in your house you want to get rid of, they can be recycled by collecting clean bags inside of one larger bag, and either including this bag in your recycling bin or taking it to a grocery store that collects plastic bags, such as County Market.
- You might want to also consider getting a set of reusable produce bags for grocery shopping — they are widely available in sets of three or more on Amazon and other online retailers.

**II. *Elective Action #11: Eliminate the use of single-use coffee pods.***

It's probably not brand new information for most of you that single use coffee pods have an awful environmental impact. The most popular of such pods and coffee machines is the Keurig, which brews coffee and other beverages from single-use plastic pods, called K-Cups, that are non-biodegradable and in most places non-recyclable. Despite the growing awareness of the environmental perils of this design model, Keurig routinely sells three billion or more K-Cups a year. The cups may be small, but with numbers like that, their volume rapidly accumulates.

K-Cups are made out of #7 type plastic, which is not commonly recyclable and the main reason why it is so important to cut back on their consumption. There are programs to ship masses of used K-Cups to places where they can be incinerated or recycled, but doing so also uses carbon energy to transport them (and incineration of plastic often results in air pollution). The company that manufactures Keurig products, Green Mountain Roasters, has promised that all K-Cups made will be recyclable by 2020. However, this is still a small ways away. And even once this happens, there are still plenty of impacts that will be made just by the production of these cups, not to mention that they will not all actually get recycled.

Keurigs and other similar systems are popular and convenient, making them abundant in offices. If your house has a Keurig, we know that it will be hard to let go of. Thankfully, it's not absolutely necessary to get rid of it. The company also produces the "My K-Cup," which is a reusable K-Cup filter. With a My K-Cup, any type of coffee grounds or other beverage base can be loaded into it, so the main drawback is not being able to partake in Keurig's variety of singular cup flavors. But a My K-Cup costs only about \$10, so it will also save you money in the long run — just like many eco-friendly office adjustments will! Be advised that there are different models of Keurigs and My K-Cups, so before purchasing one, be sure that it is compatible with the machine you have.

Of course, an alternate option is to simply swap out your Keurig or other single-serving machine with a standard coffee machine. Either option is acceptable for the Elective Action. However, if you have another type of single use coffee system, be sure to check if there is a reusable cup option for sale. If there isn't, then the only way to complete this action will be to replace the machine with a standard coffee machine.

**III. *Elective Action #12: Zero out your coffee waste. Use a reusable filter if possible and don't purchase individual sugar packets, creamer tubs, or stirrers.***

As dependent as we are on coffee, it is an unfortunate truth that even conventional coffee brewing produces a lot of waste. From the grounds to filters to everything we use to drink our caffeine, there's a lot of potential to cut back. Let's go through each one.

1. Filters
  - a. For every pot of coffee we brew, one paper filter is used. Imagine the amount of trees needed to supply all the filters used across the planet! Really, it makes no sense not to use reusable filters instead, and thankfully there are plenty of options. There are two main types: filters made out of plastic/metal and mesh, like [this one](#), or cloth filters that look much more like traditional paper ones. Check out the [Coffee Sock](#) for an example of these.
2. Sugar packets
  - a. This one's pretty easy — instead of purchasing individual sugar packets, buy larger containers of sugar and keep a community sugar cup available for everyone to use.
3. Creamer tubs
  - a. Again, forgo the individual tubs in favor of a larger community container of creamer or milk.
4. Stirrers
  - a. There's no need for disposable stirrers when you live in a house with (hopefully) plenty of spoons available! Really, think about how silly it is to invest so much energy in producing billions of plastic and wooden stirrers when on average each one is only used for a matter of *seconds*.
5. Grounds
  - a. This one's a bonus — there is no requirement for the disposal of grounds to get the points for this action. However, we would encourage collecting your coffee grounds to be composted instead of throwing them away. This will probably require that you ask around to see if anyone knows someone who composts who would take the grounds off your hands. Of course, another option would be to set up a compost system at your house, which would be a great way to divert even more food waste, but definitely takes a bit of work (and maybe some mess!)

#### **IV. *Elective Action #13: Share a set of reusable dishes for meals, and limit disposable plate, cup, and flatware usage as much as possible.***

The two most common materials in disposable dishware are paper and plastic, which cause a lot of damage to the earth when produced for single-use purposes.

Paper plates, paper cups, plastic silverware, plastic cups, etcetera abound on college campuses. They are undeniably convenient, but also make up a significant portion of our waste stream.

By replacing these items with reusable versions, this output of waste will be cut, the long term carbon footprint of your chapter will decrease, less trees will be cut down, and you'll also be able to save money by not having to continue to buy disposable products. There is, obviously, one caveat to all of this: having to wash the dishware after use. This is why disposable dishware was invented, after all: sometimes it's a whole lot easier to throw it away. But this kind of mindset is not conducive to having a sustainable planet. Being sustainable means having to make some concessions to the lifestyles and habits we are used to.

Of course, you probably have a dishwasher, so this doesn't really have to be all that much extra work. Having to wash all of these dishes only really becomes a challenge if it must be done by hand.

Here are some tips to hopefully make this conversion a little bit easier:



*Photo Credit: Pixabay*

- For each event which will result in a lot of dirty dishware, assign rotating teams of chapter members to dishwashing duties.
- Try to make sure your dishwasher doesn't get overused — ie, don't run it everyday if it's not filled with dishes everyday, as this is a waste of water.
- Consider choosing dish soaps and detergents made out of more eco-friendly ingredients. Common brands include [Seventh Generation](#) and [ECOS](#).
- When hand drying dishes, use regular cloth towels, not paper towels.
- Don't throw away the disposable products you still have on hand. They've already been purchased, so throwing them away unused or having them sit on a shelf forever won't do much good either. Save them for your biggest upcoming events where it will be the most difficult to wash the dishes.
- You don't necessarily need to go buy brand new reusable products either. Ask around the house to see if anyone has any unused dishware they'd be willing to donate, or check out what's at Goodwill or the Habitat ReStore. This will lower your environmental footprint as well!
- Since much of your disposable dishware use is probably at special events, don't feel like you have to haul out your standard everyday dishes, which may be a hassle or not enough for all of your attendees. Look for cheap and



lightweight, but still reusable, plastic dishware that can be more easily handled at large events.

**V. *Elective Action #14: Order your spirit wear from vendors that use recycled plastic fiber, organic cotton, or sustainable practices rather than mass unsustainable production.***

Recently, there has been a lot of buzz about the unsustainability of “fast fashion” — which is the practice of mass producing trendy clothing at high speeds and low prices. This clothing isn’t very sturdy, so it ends up in [landfills very quickly](#), filling them up and often leaching toxic dyes into the ground. Furthermore, fast fashion requires a lot of energy inputs to keep up with the pace of production and is causing cotton shortages in some places around the world. And these are just some of the environmental impacts; this is not even to mention the issues of unfair labor practices often used by these clothing manufacturers.

Typically, the type of stores most associated with fast fashion are those like H&M and Forever 21. However, many of the same concerns surrounding their clothes also apply to all mass clothing production, particularly the production of custom spirit wear apparel ordered en masse on college campuses. The t-shirts we get at college, whether they’re free or specially ordered for a group like your chapters, are often prized possessions. So it’s an unfortunate truth that the large majority of them are made from new raw materials, inorganic cotton, and with general unsustainable production practices.

However, your chapter can be part of reversing this trend! There are a number of green and eco-friendly custom printing options available online. By choosing to utilize one of these for your apparel needs, you can be confident your chapter is doing its part to reduce the impacts of unsustainable clothing production.

Here are some options to get you started:

- [Custom Ink Organic Cotton T-shirts](#)
- [Greg Barber Company Eco-Friendly Printing](#); organic and recycled t-shirts (also prints tote bags and greeting cards)
- [Print Natural Screenprinting](#); eco-inks and organic apparel
- [Ink Forest](#); water-based inks, sustainable practices, options for organic, fair trade, and fair labor shirts (also based in Oak Forest, Illinois — a shorter shipping distance than the other companies!)

**VI. *Elective Action #15: Commit as a chapter to use reusable water bottles instead of drinking bottled water (one point for every five members who make the pledge, max of 5 points).***

Let's start this action off with some trivia questions:

1. How many disposable plastic water bottles are drunk by Americans every year?
  - a. 500 million
  - b. 10 billion
  - c. 30 billion
  - d. 50 billion
  - e. 75 billion

(Of course, quantifying such large numbers can be quite the challenge for most people, so don't worry about grading your guesses.)

Answer:

[\(d\) - 50 billion](#)

It's safe to say we have quite the attachment to these bottles and their convenience. Assuming a population of around 325 million people, that's an average of approximately 154 bottles per person per year.



*Photo Credit: iSEE*

2. In 2014, what was the recycling rate for plastic bottles in the U.S.?
  - a. 17%
  - b. 31%
  - c. 53%
  - d. 77%
  - e. 92%

Answer:

[\(b\) 31%](#)

Yikes. We're not doing so hot, to be frank. Considering that the rate for total household recyclables is 34%, there is some work to be done here. There are a number of reasons we can't keep consuming and not recycling plastic at this rate. First and foremost are of course the climate concerns — producing 50 billion or more plastic bottles a year (for one country alone) requires what is not an insignificant amount of carbon based energy. Next, there's the fact that polyethylene terephthalate (or PET) plastic does not decompose. That leaves non-recycled bottles with one of two likely fates: sitting in a landfill forever, where they leach toxins into the soil, or if not responsibly disposed of, finding their way eventually into the oceans, where they will eventually reach one of the five great garbage patches swirling in our seas. Lastly, our supplies of plastic are not going to last forever. Earth's resources are finite and it does not help for us to use them up faster than we can develop replacements.

Thankfully, water is widely available out of taps and drinking fountains. We don't need to depend on bottled water at all. Encourage your chapter members to exclusively use reusable water bottles. They'll probably find this a whole lot easier, and much cheaper, in the long run than purchasing cases and cases of disposable bottles. For those in the chapter that are uncomfortable drinking unfiltered tap water, it could be a wise investment to purchase for the house a [water-filtering pitcher](#) or [filters for the sink](#) itself,\* if you don't already have one. Though it's also worth considering that the source of our tap water is the Mahomet Aquifer, one of the cleanest and freshest aquifers in the country. It scarcely needs any filtering!

In short: our usage of disposable plastic is a huge problem. One product which we can easily make a significant reduction without that much effort or change to our lifestyles (or offices!) is plastic water bottles. Purchase them only when you are *absolutely* sure they are necessary!

*\*Please note that we're not necessarily recommending any of these particular products — the links are only to show examples of these products. Filters can be bought at many stores around town, meaning you don't need to order from the Internet unless you prefer to do so.*

## V. Transportation Elective Actions

One of the most common calls to individual action for the sake of the environment is for everyone to drive their cars less often. Aside from electric vehicles, pretty much every car on our roads today is fueled at least in part by gasolines derived from petroleum, one of the three carbon-intensive fossil fuels extracted from the Earth. As of 2016, [nearly 270 million](#) passenger vehicles were registered in the United States,

which together accounted for about [one-fifth of our total](#) greenhouse gas emissions. To further put it in perspective, each gallon of gasoline consumed accounts for roughly 24 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions. This is why cutting driving out of your life is one of the biggest steps you can take to reduce your personal carbon footprint. Thankfully, we have plenty of alternative transportation options in Champaign-Urbana that can help lower your dependence on cars.

**I. *Elective Action #15: Take action to make sure all members are aware of the closest bus routes to your house and how to use their iCard as an MTD bus pass.***

Champaign-Urbana is lucky to have one of the best public transportation systems in the United States — the bus system known as the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District, or the MTD. In its almost fifty years of operation, the MTD has won multiple awards and has been nationally recognized as a leading transit system in the country, and currently provides about [11,000,000 rides per year](#). Best of all, as long as we have our iCards, every one of us can ride it for free.

Students primarily use the bus to get around on-campus, and are more likely to drive a car or find someone else with a car to get somewhere off campus. While taking the bus might not be as convenient as using a car, the MTD can also get you to almost any corner of CU you might need to go. By making sure everyone in your house is aware of your local bus stop as well as where the buses that stop there can take you, the perception that you need a car to go anywhere off-campus may change.



*Photo Credit: iSEE*

Of course, the most eco-friendly way to do this would be to send out a chapter-wide email — but it may also be helpful to have a printout posted on the wall as a continual reminder. For updates on the MTD, plus all the information you will need about your local bus stops, be sure to peruse the [MTD website](#).

**II. *Elective Action #16: Set up a carpooling program to reduce the number of single occupant drives.***

Of course, there will be times when taking the bus off-campus somewhere is too infeasible or impractical and a car will have to be used. In this case, in order to reduce the impact of the drive, it is best to have more than one occupant in the car — in other words, to carpool. Most of you are probably familiar enough with the concept



of carpooling that detailed instructions aren't quite necessary. However, it is best for your house to set up a carpool system that works best for the majority of members. It can be minimal, such as simply asking anyone about to drive somewhere to check with other house members to see if they want to come along; or more organized, like having a schedule in place. As long as you end up reducing the number of single occupant drives, your carpool system will be considered a success!

### III. ***Elective Action #17: Provide a bike rack/bike storage for your house.***

Another great way to get around that is less environmentally impactful is bicycling, not to mention that it's great exercise as well! Biking is especially very popular on college campuses such as our own, so it's important to have parking and storage available across campus. If your house doesn't currently have a bike rack, we recommend examining the property for a good place to install one if funds are available. Alternative storage spaces like garages or any other sheltered, locked area on your property will work as well. Bike theft is also prevalent across college campuses, so having a secure place for storage is absolutely essential.

Visit [bike.illinois.edu](http://bike.illinois.edu) for more information about biking on campus!



Photo Credit: iSEE

### IV. ***Elective Action #18: Commit as a chapter to use active transportation (bus, walking, bicycling, etcetera) for all local travel when weather permits (one point for every five members who make the pledge).***

We know that inclement weather can be a big deterrent to using active transportation. So, this pledge asks that all who take it commit to walking, biking, bussing to get around CU when the weather



reasonably permits it. Skateboarding and rollerblading are also acceptable forms of active transportation.

*Photo Credit: iSEE*

## VI. Innovation & Engagement Elective Actions

This section of elective actions has the least amount of concrete actions to take. These actions have more to do with increasing engagement with sustainability around campus and using your creativity to come up with new solutions to the problems we face. Both are just as important to sustainability as making sure your recyclables end up in the right bin!

### ***I. Elective Action #19: Refer another chapter to join the program (2 points).***

There are thousands of students involved in Greek life on campus, and we would love to have every single one involved in CGCP. However, for this dream to become a reality, we will need your help spreading the word to other chapters. By encouraging your friends in other chapters to get their houses to join the program, you can both help us grow our influence and earn elective points. For chapters we might not have been able to convince, or who might have missed our correspondence, it's probably a more compelling case to join coming from friends than receiving more unsolicited messages from iSEE.

Once you've recruited a chapter, getting your points isn't hard — just contact us to let us know who you've recruited, and ask the recruited office to mention yours when they make contact with us. Remember, as we've said before, sustainability is a team effort. So don't be afraid to encourage others to join in!

### ***II. Elective Action #20: As a chapter, participate in an on-campus sustainability program such as Illini Lights Out, the Campus Bike Census, or a lecture during the iSEE Congress. If you volunteer at an iSEE event, we're happy to track attendance to record service hours.***

It's not only within your own house that your chapter has the potential to make a difference — there are also plenty of opportunities to help make the campus itself more sustainable each year or learn more about sustainability. Get a group of at least

five chapter members (but preferably as many as you can!) together to volunteer or attend a lecture together.

- iSEE's most regular volunteer program is [Illini Lights Out](#), designed to demonstrate the immense energy-saving impact of turning off the lights. Once or twice a month on Friday nights, volunteers gather to tour campus buildings to record how many lights were left on and turn them off. Each event takes roughly an hour and a half, and there are always snacks!
  - Keep an eye on our website, or [subscribe to the iSEE newsletter](#), to stay notified of all scheduled events. Each ILO is published as a [Facebook event](#) as well.



*Photo Credit: iSEE*

- Each semester, a Bike Census is conducted by Facilities & Services to monitor the number of bicycles on campus. These numbers have helped create a Campus Bike Parking Map, and this year, will help locate spots for future bike racks and other bicycle infrastructure improvements. Many volunteers are needed to get the most accurate numbers possible!
  - Check [Bike at Illinois](#) each semester to find out when the next bike census will be held!
- Each year, iSEE hosts a multi-day Congress to foster critical thinking about a specific topic relating to sustainability. There are multiple lectures each day on a wide variety of subjects related to that year's theme, as well as several keynote lectures. Gather a group from your chapter to attend a lecture and learn more about sustainability!
  - The 2018 iSEE Congress took place from October 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> at the Illini Union. [Visit our website](#) for more information, be sure to check back for information about next year's Congress in a couple of months!
- We also publicize other volunteer and lecture events each week in our [E-newsletter](#)!
- One week to specifically look out for events and opportunities is Sustainability Week, which takes place each year at the end of October. Some events that



have taken place during Sustainability Week include litter pick-up events and a workshop on socially responsible personal investing.

- Other places to look for volunteering opportunities would be at the [Sustainable Student Farm](#), and with the RSO [Students for Environmental Concerns](#).

\*\*\*COVID 19 Updates: Many of these events have temporarily closed to prevent social gatherings. There are similar virtual sustainability programs, such as weekly zoom meetings by [Illinois Student Government Committee on Environmental Sustainability](#) or the [Everyday Environment Webinar Series](#). Attending virtual lectures, programs, and other sustainability events as a chapter counts toward a credit!

### **III. Elective Action #21: Form a Green Team to share the responsibilities of the Sustainability Ambassador and encourage creativity.**

While your job as Sustainability Ambassador is very important, the work doesn't all have to be on you! By forming a Green Team to assist in implementing your chapter's Actions, not only will you have less work to do, but the chapter will become more engaged in your sustainability efforts. The Green Team can be hands-on, brainstorming focused, meet every week or just once a semester — it just depends on what is best for your chapter! The point is: find your allies, and give them ways to engage.

Here are some ideas of what your Green Team can do:

- Monitor the house: find volunteers to make sure the right products are being recycled and thrown away in the right bins, encourage reusable water bottles, or take walks to turn off lights in nearby empty rooms.
  - Designate someone to design reusable water bottles for the chapter.
  - Designate a group of people to make sure lights and other devices are turned off at the end of the day (we have a [template](#) for this from our Green Office program — feel free to use this or base your own design off of this one.)
- Accomplish the elective actions by committee, perhaps by assigning one action per person. For example:
  - Designate someone to purchase your chosen recycled content paper, Fair Trade items, reusable bags, etcetera.
  - Have someone make the labels and signs for your light switches, power strips, and other devices as a reminder to turn them off.
  - Get a group together to buy locally sourced food and prepare a weekly meal with it.

- Hold occasional meetings to brainstorm ways to keep greening the house and reflect on your progress.
- We also have a [Green Team template](#) for the Green Office program. Again, feel free to use this template or the general idea to keep track of everyone's duties.

Don't feel limited by these ideas though! Just like most things, sustainability initiatives really benefit through collaboration and creativity. Divide up duties and tasks however you and your sisters or brothers see fit.

#### **IV. Elective Action #22: Come up with your own initiative to make your chapter greener — and tell us about it!**

The key to achieving a sustainable way of life for our future is creativity. Humanity has an abundance of environmental challenges to overcome to ensure our continued growth and comfort. Therefore, we need creativity on all scales, including in university offices, to make this happen.

So fire up those thinking engines! Gather up your Green Team and take a good look around your house. Critically examine all of your energy uses and sources of waste output. If there's more you think you can do to reduce them, give it a go. Think about how you could substantially expand engagement and awareness of ecological issues. (Maybe some sort of public event, lecture, or initiative?)

Don't be afraid to dream big. No idea is a bad idea, so please don't hesitate to let us know of any that you have. Though we can't promise we can give a point for every idea, we would love to hear them all anyway and work with you the best we can to make them happen!

#### **V. Elective Action #23: Incorporate sustainability into your academic plans.**

There are plenty of opportunities to make sustainability not only a part of your personal life, but expand into your academic and professional life as well. Having experience and knowledge in a blossoming field will boost your job options, inspire new ways of thinking, and help you make connections between seemingly unrelated fields. It's expected that as climate change continues to shape our world, the trend of careers requiring education, certification, or knowledge in sustainability related concepts will [become the norm](#). Partaking in it now will not only boost your involvement now, it can put you ahead of the curve for future job markets. So whether you're in engineering, dance, or food sciences, there are always ways to think critically about how your current field can evolve and become more sustainable. Check out [this list](#) of current job types that involve knowledge in sustainability. Here are academic actions you can take to meet certification:

- Minor in sustainability

- Earn the [certificate of environmental writing](#)
- Become a [SEE Fellow](#)
- Take a [sustainability related elective](#).

These opportunities can supplement your current major and round out your knowledge base, or add something completely new to your schedule (and resume!). Earn 1 point for every 5 members who meet one of these criteria.

## VII. Conclusion

First and foremost, we at the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment would like to thank you in advance for taking part in the Certified Green Chapter Program. Every little bit of effort counts when it comes to making our campus greener, and we are looking forward to awarding your certifications!

While we have a master plan for making campus more sustainable (see information about the Illinois Climate Action Plan [here](#)), this plan cannot account for the impact of entities outside the university's direct jurisdiction, such as the campus Greek system. By having chosen to participate in the CGCP, you are complementing and even further advancing the iCAP's goals and mission by:

- Conserving energy through Required Action #3 and Elective Actions #6-8
- Promoting more sustainable transportation with Elective Actions #16-19
- Preserving water directly with Elective Action #9 and indirectly through many other actions (reducing meat consumption & energy usage, etcetera)
- Increasing responsible purchasing of ethical and sustainable products, and minimizing waste generation/promoting recycling with Elective Actions #10-15
- Reducing the impacts of agriculture, land use, and food with Elective Actions #1-5

The iCAP allows the campus to work towards each of these general goals on a large scale, but there's absolutely more work to be done, which is why it is so important to engage as many groups as possible, including the Greek community. With each house that joins the program, the larger our campus culture of sustainability grows.

As a reminder, remember that CGCP certification is not permanent! Each certification is a year-long designation, so getting certified this year does not mean you will continue to be certified in coming years. This is because sustainability is a continuous process, and we always have more work to do. As such, we would like to ask that you make sure your chapter continues to re-enroll in the coming years for the next certification cycles!

We would also love to have a photo gallery of our Certified Green Chapters! Please send us photos of your chapter, Green Team, and/or sustainability improvements around your houses. We can't wait to see the changes you have made and to recognize all of your agents of change!

Lastly, don't forget that the CGCP is just the beginning - there's endless ways to keep making your own life more sustainable, and we encourage you to continue living by the principles and actions of the program even once you've moved out of your chapter house. Please consider doing everything you can to extend the mission of the Certified Green Chapter into your long term habits, and promote them to your friends and family!