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CEC's Refill Stations Getting Students to 'Rethink the Drink'

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By Kathi King for Community Environmental Council

Program at six local schools proves successful in reducing the use of plastic bottles

Since installing six refill stations on local elementary, junior high, high school and college campuses at the beginning of the year, the [Community Environmental Council](#) reports that students have used the stations 46,827 times as of Monday — dramatically reducing their use of disposable plastic water bottles.

The CEC launched its "[Rethink the Drink](#)" campaign in January, installing six refilling stations at [Santa Barbara High](#) (two units), [Santa Barbara Junior High](#), [Franklin Elementary](#), [Montecito Union Elementary](#) and the [Westmont College](#) gym. The refill stations dispense cold, filtered water with both a regular water fountain spout and a quick-fill mechanism, and electronically display the number of times they've been used.



Before the project, a waste audit of Franklin Elementary showed that student, faculty and staff were using (and throwing away) 275 bottles of water per week. Since installing a refill station, they used fewer than 50 a week. Over the course of a school year, that's the equivalent of going from more than 11,000 bottles to fewer than 2,000.

"It is such a wonderful thing to teach students about saving the environment by them taking part," Franklin Principal Casie Killgore said. "Students as young as 4 have learned about how they are saving the Earth by using canteens and the refill station. Our kids are healthier and have decided they'd rather drink water than bring anything from home because the canteens are cool and the water tastes good."

To encourage the students to use the refill stations, the CEC and its project funders distributed reusable stainless steel canteens to all 600 students and staff at Franklin Elementary. At Santa Barbara High, 200 canteens were distributed with the help of the [Dons Net Café](#) student entrepreneur class, and Santa Barbara Junior High raffled more than 50 canteens to students. Using its own funding, the Montecito Union School

PTA's Green Team distributes canteens at the beginning of the year to every student and staff member.

In addition, CEC attends classes and rallies to educate the student body about the negative health and environmental impacts of bottled water, such as:

- » The production and transportation of bottled water is very energy intensive. More than 17 million barrels of oil each year are used to bring bottled water to our stores — enough to fuel 1 million vehicles for a year.
- » Bottled water is not safety-tested as often as tap water, and can cost more than 1,000 times the price of tap.

“Despite being recyclable, most bottled water is consumed on-the-go, and fewer than 30 percent of the bottles are recycled,” said Kathi King, the CEC's Rethink the Drink program manager. “The rest end up in landfills or as trash in storm drains and watersheds.”

This week, the CEC is releasing “Pointless Plastic,” a short video highlighting the need to reduce dependence upon bottled water. [Click here](#) to view the video.

Rethink the Drink's funding partners are the [Orfalea Foundations](#), the [Ann Jackson Family Foundation](#), [MedBridge Development](#) and the Montecito Union School Green Team.

— *Kathi King is the manager of the [Community Environmental Council's Rethink the Drink program](#).*

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