



OKAPI Reusable Cup Network Helps Reduce Waste in San Mateo

San Mateo, CA – Every year, U.S. consumers discard 120 billion disposable cups, but a new initiative in Downtown San Mateo now offers cafe customers a more sustainable way to enjoy their beverages to-go.

The City of San Mateo is partnering with OKAPI Reusables, thanks to leadership and funding from the County of San Mateo Office of Sustainability. OKAPI is a simple borrow and return reusable cup service, featuring trendy insulated stainless steel cups for hot drinks and glass tumblers for iced drinks.

Single-use cups are often used for just minutes before being thrown away, and are a major source of waste as only a small fraction of consumers are in the habit of bringing their own cups to local cafes. OKAPI provides patrons at four San Mateo businesses a way to enjoy their favorite beverage on the go without adding another cup to the waste stream.

3 Bees Coffee (224 E. 3rd Avenue), **Urban Ritual** (140 B Street), **Meet Fresh** (227 S. B Street) and **Heere Tea** (253 S. B Street), are the first cafes to join the OKAPI Reusables network in San Mateo. Business owners are excited to join the sustainability-minded partnership.

“Here at Urban Ritual, we always try to be more environmentally conscious,” said David Zhou, owner of Urban Ritual. Hopefully, as Okapi grows, a network of rotating cups will develop within the community and will further the reduction of waste, improving environmentally sustainability.”

“Sustainability is important to us here at 3 Bees, which is why we are glad to be one of the first cafes participating in this program that will help educate the community on reducing waste,” said Rafat Haddad, owner of 3 Bees.

OKAPI will grow the network of participating cafes and plans to recruit additional cafes across San Mateo as part of this partnership. This effort complements the City of San Mateo’s Disposable Food Service Ware Ordinance, which prohibits most single-use plastics at restaurants and requires compostable to-go products.

How OKAPI works for customers: Customers can join by downloading the OKAPI Reusables mobile app and paying a one-time \$10 membership fee. For a limited time, visitors at participating cafes can receive half off the membership fee. To borrow a cup, customers scan a QR code at the cafe counter. Cups are easily returnable at participating cafes by scanning another QR code at designated return bins. Customers can borrow up to two cups at a time and can keep the cups for up to two weeks.

How OKAPI works for cafes: There is no upfront investment for the reusable cups. OKAPI stocks cafes with enough cups needed to keep up with demand. Cafes just wash and sanitize the cups following the same public health standards as for dine-in reusable dishware. Potential funding is available from the County of San Mateo Office of Sustainability for businesses interested in participating.

Learn more at <https://www.okapi-reusables.com/>.

