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Stamford students surpass half-million mark in bottle cap challenge



Sophie Vaughan | Jan. 22, 2020



Sixth-graders from Dolan Middle School, including Liah Bailey, work on experiments to learn about how plastics enter the ecosystem in conjunction with the The One Million Bottle Cap Challenge Friday, Nov. 1, 2019, at the SoundWaters headquarters at Cove Island Park in Stamford, Conn. SoundWaters has launched the initiative with Stamford Photo: Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

STAMFORD — A student challenge to collect 1,000,000 plastic bottle caps before they reach the Long Island Sound has now surpassed the half-way point.

As of this month, Stamford students have gathered more than half a million caps through the One Million Bottle Caps project, which SoundWaters, a Stamford-based environmental education nonprofit, launched this fall in collaboration with the Stamford Public Schools and funded through a three-year, \$200,000 grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“It’s fun to see how people have been contributing and how much they care about the environment,” said Emilia Reciuga, a sixth-grader at Rogers International School, which has thus far collected more bottle caps — 125,969, than any other Stamford school.

SoundWaters presented the challenge to Stamford Public Schools sixth-graders as a way to address the ubiquitous but often invisible problem of microplastics, which once in the Sound, break down into tiny pieces that animals ingest, causing life-threatening problems.

After its launch, the project soon gained support from all of Stamford’s schools in addition to area companies and organizations.

All four of Stamford's Grade A ShopRite grocery stores now have receptacles where people can donate caps.

"We put the bins in all of our bottle rooms where people are returning their bottles and cans. I got to say, we're getting a lot of bottle caps in there," said Dominick Cingari, chief sustainability officer for ShopRite, who noted he was inspired to get the stores involved in the challenge through his own kids who attend Stamford schools.

Schools outside Stamford have also caught word of the challenge, including Florence E. Smith STEM School in West Hartford, which recently donated more than 100,000 caps to the project, bringing the total collected past the half-million mark.

"It's always exciting when schools jump on board. There's a lot to be learned. It's not about the bottle caps really. It's about keeping all that plastic out of circulation," said Bob Mazzone, SoundWaters vice president for development.

A full list of companies, organizations and schools participating in the challenge can be found on the [project's website](#).

The success of the project at Rogers has been a group effort, said the school's sixth-grade science teacher Steve Staley.

"We rounded up a handful of sixth-graders from each homeroom and called it a leadership committee and they brainstormed ways to raise the most caps," said Staley.

Among the tactics used at Rogers include inter-grade competitions to compile the most caps, announcements and displays in the school.

Both Reciuga and her fellow Rogers sixth-grader Rebecca Bear are on the leadership committee and said the challenge has been a highlight of the year.

"If you think about it and we actually get to a million bottle caps, which I think we might, then there will definitely still be more out there and that's a real issue and we have to fix it," said Bear.

Reciuga agreed the challenge doesn't stop at one million caps.

"It makes me want to keep on collecting more and more trash because the one million bottle caps is just the first impact on the world we can have," said Reciuga. "I think we should collect more every single year."

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