

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA 2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Summary

This 21st Annual Report on Sustainable Practices highlights the achievements of the University of California's (UC) comprehensive sustainability program in 2024. It includes progress in sustainable operations required by [UC's Sustainable Practices Policy](#) as well as sustainability accomplishments in education, research, investments and public service. As a theme for this year, the 2024 report highlights UC's collective action on the climate crisis.

The University's sustainability commitment began in 2003 with a Regental action that led to the adoption of a Presidential Policy on Green Building Design and Clean Energy Standards in 2004. Since adopting that policy, UC has expanded the scope to include climate, transportation, building operations, waste, procurement, food, water, health and well-being, health care operations, sustainability performance, as well as anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion. The Sustainable Practices Policy includes all ten campuses, six academic health centers, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and UC Office of the President.

Climate Change

UC's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are reported on a calendar year basis, so the 2024 report includes emissions through the end of 2023. Emissions rose in 2023, reflecting the impact of returning to work, school and business travel post-pandemic. In aggregate, GHG emissions in 2023 increased 1 percent compared with 2022. Scope 1 emissions remained relatively constant, scope 2 emissions decreased by 4 percent and scope 3 (including commute and air travel) emissions increased 10 percent. However, the University's total emissions remained 8 percent lower than pre-pandemic levels and 23 percent lower than when tracking began in 2009, despite student enrollment increasing by 30 percent and building square footage increasing by 22 percent.

In July 2023, the University adopted new, stronger Climate Action goals in its Sustainable Practices Policy. The new climate action goals prioritize direct emission reductions, limit the use of carbon offsets and align UC's climate goals with the State's. In addition, the policy enacts a framework and timetable for campuses and health centers to hit progressively more stringent GHG emissions reductions in 2030, 2035, and 2040 and fully decarbonize no later than 2045. Each campus and its associated academic health center completed an energy decarbonization study, supported by funding from the State, in fall 2024. These studies, which also consider equity impacts and educational and research opportunities related to decarbonization, provide pathways for campuses and health centers to achieve the policy's decarbonization targets. However, these projects will need to be implemented in a phased approach as funding sources are identified and become available.

Additionally, by the end of 2024, all campuses (including their associated academic health centers) will have set scope 1 emissions reduction targets for 2030, 2035 and 2040. The systemwide [Pathways to a Fossil Free UC Task Force](#) will release the results of the decarbonization studies and resulting emissions reduction targets in 2025.

In 2025, these locations will complete climate action plans that outline the steps that they will take to meet those targets on the path toward achieving a 90 percent reduction in total emissions no later than 2045. The climate action plans will also consider equity impacts and climate resilience as a continuation of each location's work in these areas.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice

Aligning with the systemwide priority of decarbonizing campuses and academic health centers,

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the Sustainability and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Working Group focused on supporting the efforts to incorporate principles of anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion into the implementation of the Climate Action policy goals. As part of the State-funded decarbonization studies, each UC location identified climate justice and equity considerations related to the transition of energy infrastructure to fossil free. These analyses looked at potential impacts on labor from electrifying energy infrastructure and procedural equity that seeks to develop more effective solutions through inclusive processes, decision-making and equitable distribution of resources. The working group partnered with a systemwide consultant to synthesize findings, share best practices and identify potential decarbonization equity indicators.

Clean Energy and Energy Efficiency

Procuring clean energy and using energy efficiently play a major role in reducing GHG emissions. The University has made significant progress towards its clean energy goals and is [ranked first](#) among colleges and universities in green electricity use according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. UC now uses 700,000 megawatt hours of clean electricity annually — enough to power 110,000 homes for a year. On its campuses, UC has installed more than 100 solar projects representing 55 megawatts of capacity. The University also continues to expand its renewable energy commitments off-site in support of decarbonization. UC has contracts for two operating utility-scale solar projects in California representing 80 megawatts of power, and an additional 30-megawatt solar facility with a 15-megawatt battery that is expected to come online in 2025. UC's own electric service provider, UC Clean Power, continues to serve campuses with 100 percent clean electricity.

UC continues to pursue energy efficiency across its operations. In this reporting year, UC locations worked to retain energy reductions while managing increased occupancy and activities. Energy efficiency projects and high efficiency new buildings avoided approximately \$108 million in energy costs in 2023, for a cumulative avoidance of approximately \$524 million since 2010.

Food

In fiscal year 2023–24, approximately 18 percent of campus food purchases and 20 percent of academic health center food purchases met one or more sustainability criteria. This represents nearly \$37 million going to sustainable food suppliers. Campus sustainable food spend increased by 16 percent compared with the previous year and academic health center sustainable food spend remained the same. In support of efforts to define the actions and resources needed to procure at least 25 percent of the University's food supplies from sustainable sources by 2025, five years ahead of the University's existing goal, the University piloted a Leading on Climate Sustainable Food Services Student Fellowship Program. The UC Global Climate Leadership Council also funded a project to provide technical assistance for advancing sustainable food supply chain sourcing and dining practices. In the first year of the project, the team engaged all campuses and academic health centers to understand challenges, opportunities, and future planning and collaboration opportunities. The first year of the project concluded with a sustainable food summit, where findings from the project were shared with dining teams from across the UC system and planning for the second year was initiated.

Thirty-one percent of the food and beverage spend on campuses and 23 percent of the spend at academic health centers went towards plant-based food items. This fiscal year, eight campuses and two academic health centers were able to reach the policy goal of at least 25 percent spend on plant-based food by 2030.

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General Sustainability Performance Assessment

All nine undergraduate UC campuses participate in the [Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System \(STARS\)](#). Five of the nine campuses held a Gold rating in fiscal year 2023–24. Two other undergraduate campuses, UC Merced and UC Irvine, have a Platinum rating, the highest STARS ranking. UC Berkeley and UC Riverside extended their STARS reporting timeframe to submit through the just launched and more comprehensive STARS version 3.0 framework. Additionally, five academic health centers received sustainability awards from [Practice Greenhealth](#). UC Davis Health and UCLA Medical Center, Santa Monica also received the Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award, Practice Greenhealth's highest honor for hospitals.

Green Building

UC now has 445 LEED certifications for green buildings totaling over 37 million square feet. UC does not allow on-site fossil fuel combustion (e.g., natural gas) for space and water heating in new buildings or major renovations, except under special circumstances. The University currently has 30 occupied electric buildings and another three that do not use electricity for space or water heating (accounting for approximately 3 million square feet). Another 50 electric buildings (over 9 million square feet) are in planning, design or under construction. UC locations are pursuing Parksmart certification for 10 new parking projects, adding to the University's three existing facilities.

Health and Well-Being

The University made progress toward its healthy vending and chemicals of concern goals over the past year. Eight campuses established baseline data on current vending machine spend. The Systemwide Sustainability Policy Health and Well-Being Working Group developed informational materials on indoor air quality impacts from air fresheners and sustainable furniture purchasing as a step to reduce chemicals of concern on campus.

Procurement

The University and its procurement staff continued to partner with strategic suppliers to improve sustainability practices. The University analyzed data from 27 strategic suppliers representing \$90 million in total spend during fiscal year 2023–24. Within that spend, the University found that 69 percent of electronics, 91 percent of indoor office furniture, 45 percent of cleaning supplies and 24 percent of office supplies met UC's requirements on minimum or preferred green spend, as outlined in the [Sustainable Procurement Guidelines](#). This year, UC Health locations began reporting their green spend for the first time. Ninety-seven percent of electronics and 31 percent of office supplies met minimum or preferred green spend requirements. Academic health centers generated nearly \$8 million in cost savings through medical device reprocessing, representing 230,000 pounds of medical waste avoided. Analysis of UC's support of small businesses, which is an additional component of UC's sustainable procurement goals, is presented to the State each year and can be found [online](#).

Sustainable Building Operations and Laboratories

All campuses have completed at least three assessments through their Green Labs assessment programs. Through fiscal year 2023–24, the cumulative number of green-certified laboratories totaled 401, a 7 percent increase from the previous year.

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Transportation

The University continues to implement sustainable transportation programs and related GHG emission reduction strategies. In fiscal year 2023–24, more than 70 percent of students and employees telecommuted or commuted to campus by walking, biking, transit, vanpool or carpool. Most locations continue to report a higher rate of employee and student use of sustainable commute modes year-over-year and when compared to a 2015 baseline. Systemwide, 49 percent of all new fleet vehicles acquired were battery-electric, plug-in hybrid, or electric hybrid vehicles, approaching the 50 percent policy goal. This year, UC policy also required that all sedan and minivan acquisitions be zero-emission or plug-in hybrid vehicles. Systemwide, 74 percent of sedans and minivans met those criteria, a two-fold increase over the prior year. Over 2,100 active electric vehicle charging stations support the conversion of fleet and commute vehicles to electric options.

UC Health

Four academic health centers experienced operational and capacity expansion via acquisitions, and all locations continue to build or retrofit facilities to accommodate strategic growth. The planning, design, and/or construction at each location, in partnership with corresponding campuses, incorporates the development of decarbonization plans aiming to eliminate at least 90 percent of GHG emissions from their energy systems by 2045. In addition, each academic health center focused on waste reduction goals. Despite experiencing a 9 percent growth in adjusted patient day volume across UC Health, pounds of waste per adjusted patient days decreased by more than 13 percent. UC Health drafted an inventory of its scope 3 emissions to meet its commitment as a signatory to the [White House/Department of Health and Human Services Health Sector Climate Pledge](#) and is also developing equity-centered climate resilience plans as part of its commitment.

Water

UC's overall potable water use decreased from nearly 23,000 gallons per person per year in fiscal year 2018–19 to about 11,000 gallons per person per year in fiscal year 2023–24. Nine UC campus and health center locations exceeded their 2025 goal of a 36 percent reduction in potable water use per person. UC locations are evaluating recycled water and stormwater capture opportunities, in alignment with resilience efforts to upgrade aging infrastructure, adapt to climate change and decarbonize energy use.

Waste

In fiscal year 2023–24, campuses diverted approximately 75 percent of municipal solid waste and construction and demolition waste from landfills. Systemwide per capita waste generation at campuses remained stable, with five campuses already meeting the 2025 goal of 25 percent reduction from the 2016 baseline. Additionally, the University made significant progress toward the ambitious goal of phasing out single-use plastics by July 2024. Sixteen of 17 locations have partially or completely eliminated single-use plastic food ware in UC-operated dining facilities, cafes, and to-go facilities. Twelve locations have completely phased out plastic bags, and the remaining locations are in the process of doing so.

Sustainable Investment

UC Investments continues to integrate environmental, social, and governance factors into its investments process, including efforts to reduce and address climate risk, measure the carbon footprint of UC's investment portfolio, invest in transformational solutions, as well as use water

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and energy efficiently. UC Investments publishes an [annual report](#) on its climate-related strategies, metrics and targets.

Academics

Faculty and student leadership continue to be fundamental in achieving these operational goals while also continuing and expanding the University's position at the forefront of sustainability research, education and public service. In 2023–24, UC awarded \$83 million in [California Climate Action Seed Grants](#) and [Matching Grants](#) to 38 projects directly addressing California's climate action priorities. These grants support projects that aim to provide practical solutions to a range of climate challenges, including wildfire, drought, sea level rise and extreme heat, among others. The projects are active in every region of the State and collectively involve more than 130 community, industry, tribal and public agencies, as well as 12 UC locations, 11 California State University campuses and two private universities.

Systemwide courses related to climate change and sustainability continued to grow and scale in fiscal year 2023–24. Most notably, the UC San Diego Academic Senate approved the [Jane Teranes Climate Education Requirement](#) for incoming first-year students beginning fall 2024. Students are required to complete a one-quarter course designed to empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to confront the urgent global challenge of climate change. Beyond individual campuses, students at UC and across the world have enrolled in the [Bending the Curve course](#) developed by UC with contributions from faculty at every UC campus. In collaboration with the Bending the Curve initiative, the [UC Center for Climate, Health and Equity](#) partnered with the American Medical Association to provide continuing medical education on climate change and health. The [UC Center for Climate Justice](#) continued expanding and adapting its materials to help students understand the growing climate justice field.

UC's environmental sustainability goals are rooted in student activism, beginning more than two decades ago when students encouraged the Regents to approve UC's first green building and clean energy policy in 2003. The Bonnie Reiss Leading on Climate Student Fellowship program (previously the Climate Action and Global Food Initiative Student Fellowships) funds student-generated research, operational, and engagement projects across all UC locations. The program supported 78 fellows in 2023–24 who joined a growing network of 804 total fellows since the program's launch a decade ago.

The University's Academic Senate continued to advance climate action and education. In addition to developing and approving the Jane Teranes Climate Education Requirement at UC San Diego, the Academic Senate also sponsored the State-funded decarbonization studies at each campus, reviewed the Policy on Sustainable Practices, and advanced climate action through campus-level climate crisis committees.