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## Waste Not

Twenty hospitals join green pilot project

Philadelphia Business Journal - by [John George](#) Staff Writer

The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia is on a mission to eliminate 1,000 trash receptacles on its West Philadelphia campus and replace them with centralized recycling stations by June 30.

"We want to make it less convenient for people to drop trash in the wrong can," said Nancy Schneck, CHOP's director of environmental and linen services.

The initiative is one among dozens of projects taking place at 20 Philadelphia-area hospitals and health systems participating in a regional "green hospital" pilot project aimed at making medical centers more environmentally friendly.

The initiative was established last year by the Healthcare Improvement Foundation, a coalition of Delaware Valley hospitals working together to promote community health and patient safety, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Kate J. Flynn, the foundation's president, said the project's four main objectives are developing new strategies for reducing hospital waste, increasing recycling, expanding and standardizing environmentally preferred purchasing, and incorporating the latest energy efficient and environmentally sound building practices.

The 20 hospitals participating in the project, funded by a \$78,500 grant from the EPA, are each participating in at least one of the four groups organized to tackle each objective.

"The idea is for the groups to share their findings," Flynn said. "If one hospital finds out about something neat that another organization is doing, the hospital can adopt it."

While it's too early for any aggregated results from the participating hospitals, some success stories are emerging.

CHOP, for instance, estimates its efforts to expand paper and cardboard recycling resulted in more than 800 tons of both material being recycled last fiscal year -- the equivalent of saving more than 13,500 trees.

By donating used medical equipment to an organization that distributed medical supplies to other countries around the world, the hospital avoided sending 36 tons of hospital beds, wheelchairs, walkers and other equipment to landfills.

Schneck said this year CHOP plans to cut down on its plastic bag use by creating branded reusable bags for patients and visitors.

**St. Mary Medical Center** in Langhorne has been able to reduce the amount of waste being disposed in red bag containers -- designated for biohazardous and infectious materials -- from 459 pounds a day to 80 pounds. Nancy Kocher, St. Mary's director of environmental services, said the special containers were being used for trash that didn't belong in them because the hospital did not have enough alternative receptacles in the operating rooms.

Diane Pennington, director of integrative support services at **Doylestown Hospital**, said employees are more willing to adopt environmentally friendly practices today than in the past.

"I think the groundswell for going green is huge," she said. "You're hearing it everywhere. People want to recycle."

Flynn said part of the pilot project grant is being used to make Joe Benonis, an environmental consultant with **Holy Redeemer Hospital** in Montgomery County and president of Doylestown-based Environmental Service Technologies Inc., available to work with the hospitals.

Holy Redeemer last year was one of four local hospitals honored by the EPA with awards for environmental leadership. **Albert Einstein Medical Center**, **Abington Memorial Hospital** and **Thomas Jefferson University Hospital** were also honored.

Holy Redeemer's accomplishments have included increasing the amount of recycled materials each month from 14,000 pounds to 50,000 pounds, composting five tons of food and other organic materials per month, eliminating mercury thermometers and blood pressure monitors, and installing low-mercury lamps.

Benonis said a lot of the effort has involved tracking where all of the hospital's trash ends up.

"They call me TSI," joked Benonis. "You've heard of CSI [crime scene investigation], well, I'm the trash stream investigator."

Holy Redeemer discovered, like St. Mary Medical Center, that too much trash was being disposed of in the red bags the hospital reserves for infectious waste.

"The hospital was spending a lot of money throwing things in the red bags that it didn't need to," he said. To fix the problem, Benonis said, the hospital reconfigured where waste could be disposed of to limit access to the red bags and conducted extensive staff training to educate employees on how and where to dispose of, or recycle, trash.

"It took a lot of hard work," he said. "Old habits die hard. People are not always so prudent in how they [dispose of trash], but if somebody is watching and you keep reminding them of the proper way to do things, their behavior changes."

Benonis said another area where the health system made improvements was in meeting federal rules for destroying paper medical records. Instead of shredding the paperwork onsite, Holy Redeemer now saves money by sending it to a Northeast Philadelphia paper mill.

All the efforts have produced more than \$100,000 a year in cost savings, Benonis said.

Hospitals are also encouraging their suppliers to make their products more environmentally friendly.

In September, Abington Memorial hosted a conference on green purchasing attended by about a dozen area hospitals and a half dozen suppliers.

"The attempt was to bring the two sides together for the good of the environment," said Meg McGoldrick, Abington Memorial's executive vice president and COO. "The suppliers presented their green programs and we proposed a policy [about green purchasing] that hospitals could adopt. It's a work in progress, but we are pretty excited about it. As time goes on, we will be much more rigorous about who we will buy from based on this progress. Now we're in the awareness phase."

Abington Memorial has already been successful in eliminating DEHP, a chemical used in making products like tubing and IV bags, from the hospital. Next, it wants to get its supplier to develop a way to recycle its IV bags.

"If we buy a product and we can't easily reuse or recycle it ourselves, we are asking for the vendor's help," McGoldrick said.

**Mercy Suburban Hospital** in East Norriton, another member of the pilot project, was ahead of the curve in 2004 when it embarked on a green hospital building project.

The \$19.5 million building, which opened in 2006, houses the medical center's new emergency room, an operating room suite and a short procedure unit. It was built as part of a push by the hospital's parent organization, Catholic Health East in Newtown Square, to have its members follow environmentally friendly guidelines on new construction projects.

"The upfront costs are a little bit more, but in the end the savings you get from improved heating and ventilation and air conditioning and water use -- over the time you will have the building -- will certainly more than cover the costs," said Lisa Mallon, Mercy Suburban's CEO.

Mallon estimated the additional costs for the building -- for which Mercy is seeking green certification -- at between \$750,000 and \$1 million.

As a member of the pilot project, Mercy is also doing everything from reducing the amount of paper the hospital uses to encouraging staff members to bring their own coffee mugs to work.

"If they bring in their own mug or cup, we will give them a break on the price of the drink," Mallon said.

Like most other hospitals, Mercy Suburban has found its workers are eager to do their part to help the environment.

"When it comes to recycling they are pushing me," Mallon said. "They would like us to move faster than they we are actually moving."