

## **Covenant Health Systems earns praise for waste reduction efforts**

Today, every member of Covenant Health Systems, a Lexington, MA-based health and elder care system, has mechanisms in place to track and measure waste streams, as well as processes for waste reduction.

In 2005, Covenant implemented corporate and member-level recycling programs for items such as paper, fluorescent lights, paper, cardboard, cans, cartridges, computers and batteries. One facility – St. Joseph Hospital – has recycled over 151 tons of paper and 109 tons of cardboard the past three years.



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In addition, members coordinate the donation of their used equipment (such as furniture, beds and televisions) to other members or, when appropriate, to local and international charities such as Por Cristo, an Archdiocesan group that arranges transport of usable equipment to hospitals in developing countries. For example, Youville Hospital & Rehabilitation Center, Cambridge, MA, has donated more than \$100,000 worth of hospital equipment through Por Cristo. Some recycling efforts have been quite creative. For example, one facility contracted with a local pig farmer to collect leftover food for his animals. St. Joseph Manor (Brockton) instituted a drop off site for the “Cell Phones for Soldiers” program, gathering and shipping mobile phones to soldiers serving in Iraq. Other initiatives include switching to silverware instead of plastic and reusable cups instead of Styrofoam.

### **Four-year journey**

Covenant embarked on its journey less than four years ago, setting its first system-wide goal of improving environmental stewardship. A year later, it partnered with Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E), a collaborative healthcare industry effort to promote environmental sustainability. And a year later, Covenant achieved a benchmark rarely achieved by any hospital system when it earned H2E’s prestigious Champion for Change award, given to organizations that take a leadership role in improving environmental performance in healthcare. Only 20 organizations nationwide earned the honor this year.

Covenant repeated that success in 2006, when it earned its second “Champion” award. Today, all of its member hospitals and skilled nursing facilities are active H2E partners, and are notching significant progress in practically every area of environmental stewardship – from recycling and waste reduction, toxic chemical and mercury reduction/elimination, to energy efficiency and environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP).

“Covenant is at the forefront of a fundamental shift in the healthcare industry,” said H2E Executive Director Laura Brannen. “By introducing healthier and more responsible products and practices, Covenant is helping healthcare facilities everywhere to operate in



ways that protect the health of patients, workers, communities, and the environment. This is a revolution that benefits everyone.”

“The most exciting thing about earning the award was that *all* of our members participated in the effort, something that signifies their culture change,” said Nancy Mulvihill, vice president, corporate communications and head of Covenant’s Environmental Committee. “Accepting the challenge to be a Champion helped us move our facilities and communities forward in new areas of thoughtful action and accomplishment.”

*For the complete story about Covenant Health Systems’ environmental success, see [“Covenant Health Systems on environmental stewardship fast track”](#) on the Premier Safety Institute Green Corner Web site.*

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