

St. Elizabeth Medical Center sets new benchmarks for recycling

St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Edgewood, KY, could be easily considered one of the largest recyclers among the nation's hospitals.

Last year, the three-hospital system recycled more than 350 tons of materials, including 154 tons of cardboard, 190 tons of paper, more than 1,300 gallons of lab chemicals, and almost 12 tons of universal wastes such as fluorescent lamps, batteries, and computer monitors, safety director Mike Gabennesch said.

All told, St. Elizabeth's efforts have resulted in 23 percent of its waste stream that is either being recycled or reused. Other environmental efforts:

- St. Elizabeth also has taken great strides to eliminate the use of mercury in such products as thermometers, blood pressure cuffs and lights. By switching to digital thermometers, aneroid blood pressure gauges, and by purchasing 5000 eco-lamps or low mercury lamps, St. Elizabeth is essentially now a mercury free hospital.
- A switch to reusable sharps containers has reduced the hospital's amount of regulated medical waste by several tons.
- Switching to a hydrogen peroxide system almost entirely reduced its reliance on ethylene oxide.
- Construction materials are frequently reused or recycled for other purposes.
- Spent cooking oil is hauled for free from the facility's commissary and recycled.
- Unused food is donated to local charities, while used furniture is either sold or donated to various local and international organizations.

And these efforts have not gone unnoticed in the larger healthcare community.

In 2006, St. Elizabeth earned a Partner for Change Award from Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) for the fourth consecutive year. St. Elizabeth is one of only five hospitals in the nation out of nearly 1,300 H2E Partner hospitals to win this award four or more times.

The H2E Partner for Change Award recognizes hospitals that acknowledge and act upon the crucial link between community and environmental health. The award is given annually to facilities that have made significant and sustainable progress toward reducing waste, preventing pollution, and eliminating mercury. Recipients reduce, reuse, and/or recycle at least 10 percent of their total waste each year, and often find that these pollution prevention programs benefit both their communities and their bottom line.

"By focusing on environmental sustainability, St. Elizabeth is playing an active role in the healthcare sector's fundamental shift toward protecting public health instead of simply treating disease," said Laura Brannen, H2E director. "St. Elizabeth is to be commended for its visionary efforts to create a healthier environment for their patients, staff, and community, and for setting the example for other hospitals to follow."



St. Elizabeth also is the first and only healthcare facility to participate in KY EXCEL, a voluntary program launched earlier this year by the Department of Environmental Protection to encourage and recognize voluntary efforts that improve Kentucky's environment. For more about the program, go to www.dca.ky.gov.

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