

St. John's Riverside Hospital's green practices merit national attention

Yonkers, NY-based St. John's Riverside Hospital, part of the Riverside Health Care System, has a long history of environmental stewardship, thanks to the leadership of Kathy Smith-Bernier, director of environmental services for the 407-bed community hospital located on the banks of the Hudson River.



In 2007, the facility was honored by Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (www.h2e-online.org) with a "Partner for Change" award, which recognizes facilities that continuously improve and expand upon their mercury elimination, waste reduction, and pollution prevention programs.

Virtually no green opportunity has been left untapped at St. John's, whose "You Count" employee team regularly monitors environmental initiatives at the facility. "A lot of engineering and sweat go into making the program work," said Smith-Bernier, who has worked at the hospital for the past 23 years.

St. John's has a comprehensive policy in place for environmentally preferable purchasing of products and services.

Among St. John's Riverside Hospital's accomplishments:

- An aggressive mercury prevention program that has resulted in near elimination of the hazardous element in all hospital departments. In addition to eliminating mercury thermometers, blood pressure cuffs and nearly all mercury thermostats and mercury-containing lighting, the hospital implemented a mercury-free purchasing policy that bans the purchase of mercury-containing items without prior approval.
- Through source reduction, reuse, and recycling efforts, St. John's has eliminated at least 10 percent of its total waste stream. An exhaustive recycling program remains in place for a host of materials, including, cardboard, paper, scrap metal, glass, HDPE, tin/steel, aluminum, lead bricks and aprons from radiology, plastic film and grease. Moreover, safer recycling and disposal programs have been implemented for hazardous chemicals and universal wastes such as xylene, ballasts, fluorescent lamps, batteries, computers, silver, and motor oil. St. John's also recycles or reprocesses solvents, including xylene and alcohol, from the lab, saving the facility \$35,320 in 2006 alone. The hospital donates used items such as medical equipment and supplies,

as well as computers, furniture, toner cartridges to a global charity, and recycles old sheets into pillowcases or rags.

- A comprehensive regulated medical waste program that includes microwaving infectious waste before it is disposed of. In 2006, the hospital treated more than half a million pounds of regulated medical waste in this manner. Its waste segregation plan also ensures that hazardous materials and non-infectious materials are not placed in regulated medical waste containers.
- Use of environmentally friendly construction materials in renovations and new construction. In its new maternity suites, for example, the hospital used environmentally preferred flooring products made of recycled content. The flooring contains no volatile organic compounds in order to improve indoor air quality and meet green building standards. St. John’s also installed new Energy Star-certified refrigerators in each patient room in the new maternity suites.
- Waste minimization programs, including initiatives aimed at working with vendors to reduce packaging on medical and non-medical products. The hospital also implemented a program to reprocess single-use surgical instruments, a process that saved the hospital approximately \$78,000 in 2006.
- Green cleaning and integrated pest management programs that reduce reliance on aerosols and make use of chemicals that are safer for people and the environment.



RECYCLING POSTER ST. JOHN'S RIVERSIDE USED TO EDUCATE STAFF

In efforts to reduce the hospital’s reliance on fossil fuels, Smith-Bernier said the facility is now exploring wind power as a source of clean energy.

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