

Environmentally Preferred Sourcing Program

EPS Toolkit: Quick wins

Sometimes, doing a lot of planning and preparing when taking on a new idea is not the only direction to take. Quick wins can be another way to kick off a concept. Quick wins can have an immediate impact on your organization and:

- Provide an ideal way to quickly educate staff about your plans
- Ease your organization into the environmentally conscious movement
- Show management the savings opportunities
- Get positive publicity for your actions
- Invigorate your employees to take on more challenging projects

What you can do

Ideas for quick wins follow along with ideas that focus on these areas:

- Quick wins with food
- Eliminating polystyrene foam
- Recycle plastic bottles
- Eliminating mercury

Choose what works best for your organization

You know your culture, your time and your facility best. Choose a quick win that will kick off your sustainability program in a positive way or move a project forward. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is the most noticeable environmental problem in this facility?
- What type of initiatives are management and staff likely to support? What would be the easiest issue to work on?
- Which departments have staff that demonstrate a desire to take action on the environment?

- What departments should I avoid due to circumstances such as staff shortages or reorganization?

Know what's possible

Don't overpromise or overcommit. Remember this is a quick win and the last thing you want is to get a group of highly motivated staff frustrated because you can't get them the support they need.

Implement a starter idea

There are several small or simple things you can do to start to put the environment in the forefront. Some of these include:

- Add a footer to your email signature reminding people to print less, such as "Before printing, think about the environment."
- Create and post a simple poster about reducing energy use
- Put green tips in the employee newsletter
- Conduct a quick survey to learn more about what your colleagues would like to improve at your facility
- Invite passionate employees to help start an initiative they care about

Lead by example — communicate your message effectively to coworkers by suggesting green options that work in your life

- Go green for organizational events by using biodegradable flatware and utensils, decorate with LED lighting and serving local and organic food if possible

Use pilots to show the benefits

Pilots are small-scale test projects used to assess the viability of a concept. They usually involve one department, one area or one facility in a bigger network. Examples of a pilot you could try include:

- Implementing microfiber mops in one area, and comparing their cost and efficacy with regular mops used in other areas
- Choosing one or two local farmers to purchase food from for a six-month period
- Setting up a paper recycling program in the administrative offices of one facility
- Purchasing recycled rather than regular paper and testing it in 10 machines
- Trying a green cleaning product on one floor and comparing it to regular products

Try a project

Projects have a short duration but can be time intensive. They can create internal good feelings and positive external media play. Examples may include:

- A community mercury thermometer exchange program, where community members are encouraged to bring in their mercury containing thermometers and receive a free digital replacement – perhaps the replacement can include your organization’s logo
- A healing garden where staff and community members are encouraged to spend one or two weekends creating a beautiful healing garden on facility premises
- A facility give-back day where old furnishings and equipment (mainly computers) are offered for free to low income community members; partners would include organizations that work with the disenfranchised in your area

Quick wins with food

Consider signing the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge

Created by Health Care Without Harm, the **Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge** sends an important signal to the marketplace and policy makers about your interest in local, nutritious, sustainable food while modeling healthy food practices in an ongoing stepwise fashion. The pledge states:

- We pledge to:

- **Work** with local farmers, community-based organizations and food suppliers to increase the availability of locally sourced food
- **Encourage** our vendors and/or food management companies to supply us with food that is, among other attributes, produced without synthetic pesticides and hormones or antibiotics given to animals in the absence of diagnosed disease and which supports farmer health and welfare, and ecologically protective and restorative agriculture
- **Implement** a stepwise program to identify and adopt sustainable food procurement
- **Communicate** to our group purchasing organizations our interest in foods that are identified as local and certified
- **Educate** and communicate within our system and to our patients and community about our nutritious, socially just and ecologically sustainable, food-healthy food practices and procedures

- **Minimize** or beneficially reuse food waste and support the use of food packaging and products that are ecologically protective
- **Develop** a program to promote and source from producers and processors which uphold the dignity of family, farmers, workers and their communities and support sustainable and humane agriculture systems
- **Report** annually on implementation of this pledge

Set up a cafeteria recycling program

A facility cafeteria is a wonderful place to start a recycling program because cafeterias generate a large amount of waste. By initiating a recycling program, your cafeteria can drastically reduce waste with minimal effort, as well as:

- Cut your garbage hauling costs
- Generate additional revenues
- Provide opportunities for community partnerships
- Reduce litter and the amount of space used by garbage cans

Use contract language

If your cafeteria is run by a third-party food services supplier, put contract language into your next contract, such as:

“The contractor shall, at its own expense, design and operate a comprehensive integrated recycling program in both the front and back areas of the

facility. The items to be recycled include food waste, recyclable plastic, cans (aluminum and steel), glass, cardboard, newspaper and grease.”

Implement a 10-step plan

1. Appoint a staff member as the recycling point person.
2. Assemble a team to plan and implement the recycling program. Make sure to include maintenance workers and kitchen staff in your planning.
3. Determine how you will transport material by talking to your waste hauler or recycling haulers. Recyclables may be collected in special bins, buckets, cans or boxes (plastic liners are recommended).
4. Decide what you will recycle, which will depend on what materials your waste hauler or other company will accept and what is used. Some items to consider recycling in your cafeteria are:
 - Steel and tin cans
 - Glass jars and containers
 - Aluminum foil and cans
 - Plastic service ware
 - Paper lunch bags
 - Plastic containers for bulk food supplies
 - Milk cartons
5. Measure cafeteria waste before the recycling program begins so that you can measure the results of the program. This number will help determine how much material you will be processing through your recycling efforts. Use purchasing information to first determine the amount of each item bought. By determining the quantity and frequency of purchase, you can determine how much the cafeteria is discarding. These estimates will form the basis of several decisions in the planning process.
6. Make the collection process as easy as possible. The simpler it is to sort and recycle, the higher the participation rate will be. Ensure that you:
 - Place your recycling containers in a convenient location
 - Place large recycling containers in the kitchen area so that the staff can recycle bulk-size containers
 - Create signs to clearly identify recycling containers and their intended contents; anticipate what people are likely to do wrong (i.e., clearly explain that food scraps are not to be mixed with recyclable paper, etc.)
 - Place regular garbage cans near the recycling containers for proper disposal of nonrecyclable items
7. Have a kickoff campaign to generate enthusiasm and explain the program to staff by doing the following:
 - Meet with staff to explain the procedures of the program and answer questions
 - Use internal bulletins or newsletters to distribute information about the program
 - Conduct a contest for the first week or month of your program so that those seen recycling get their names entered into a prize drawing
8. Monitor the bins and provide further education if required
9. Maintain momentum by:
 - Publicizing recycling totals and waste savings in your newsletter
 - Alerting local radio, TV and newspapers of the results of your program; whenever possible, give tangible results such as an estimate of how many trees were saved by the program or how many tons of garbage kept out of the landfill
 - Announcing the amount of funds raised by your recycling effort and what you will buy with these funds, if applicable
 - Using your waste analysis and recycling totals to apply for awards
10. Keep looking for ways to make your recycling program more effective. Do you need more recycling containers? Are they being sorted correctly? Is your recycler satisfied with the quality of material collected?

Recycle plastic bottles

If you still use plastic bottles and cups, or while you are phasing out their use, make sure they are recycled. To recycle plastic bottles:

1. Determine which types of plastics your recycler or waste hauler accepts – both PET (#1) and HDPE (#2) are often accepted. The code is on the bottom of the container with the recycling symbol.
2. Ask your recycler to find out if there is a market for the plastic disposable cups you use. Choosing a specific kind of cup may make recycling feasible.
3. Use clear signage to ensure the right material is put in the right bins and prevent contamination, which is the biggest obstacle to cup recycling.
4. Choose appropriate recycling containers. For example, containers for the plastic bottles with a small, round opening reduces contamination and prevents disposing plates and other larger trash items in the container.

Check out Earth911, which provides a list of companies that purchase large quantities of plastic for recycling.

Consider other ways to reduce and reuse in your cafeteria

- Switch from serving food to offering food. Letting individuals choose what they receive, instead of giving everyone the same amount of food, can result in a 50 to 90 percent reduction in food waste. When you serve unwanted amounts food, not only is the food wasted, but also the money and time to purchase, prepare and dispose of it.
- If a lot of your staff or visitors read while in the cafeteria, place a newspaper recycling bin and a mixed paper (for magazines) bin near the exits.
- Use reusable trays, cups and silverware instead of disposable items, which end up in a landfill.
- Use biodegradable plastic bags rather than the more conventional plastic bags to keep things in the cafeteria's à la carte section fresh.
- For take-out, use paper plates and napkins made from recycled and compostable products.
- Initiate a composting program for the food waste that is generated.
- Encourage staff to bring food in reusable containers such as cloth lunch sacks.
- Encourage staff to use reusable coffee mugs.
- Buy food products in bulk instead of individually packaged. For example, use large condiment containers rather than individual packets.
- Use bulk milk and juice dispensers rather than individual cartons or cans.

Recycling involves processing used materials into new products in order to prevent the waste of potentially useful materials, reduce the consumption of fresh raw materials, reduce energy usage, reduce air and water pollution by reducing the need for "conventional" waste disposal, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions as compared to virgin production. Recycling is a key component of modern waste management and is the third component of "reduce, reuse, recycle."

What materials are recyclable?

Many materials are recyclable, including glass, paper, cardboard, metal, tin, plastics, textiles, electronics, furniture and wood. Though similar, the composting of food and yard scraps is not typically considered recycling.

Recycling plastics

The recycling symbol on the bottom of many plastic containers doesn't mean that they can be recycled. The code identifies the thermoplastic resin from which the container is manufactured. There are seven codes that represent the following:

- Polyethylene terephthalate (PET #1)
- High-density polyethylene (HDPE #2)
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC #3)
- Low-density polyethylene (LDPE #4)
- Polypropylene (PP #5)
- Polystyrene (PS #6)
- Other plastics (#7)

The plastics industry designed the coding hoping that all plastics would be recycled. The plastics that are most often recycled are the Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and High-density polyethylene (HDPE), which make up more than 80 percent of the container plastics manufactured in the United States. There are far fewer markets for the other resins. Mixing different plastic resins together can reduce the price received for the bale of plastic or in some cases cause serious problems at the plastics manufacturing facility.

Eliminate nonbiodegradable polystyrene foam

There are several benefits to reducing and removing polystyrene foam in your facility, including reducing waste and increasing savings in waste reduction, inventory management and purchasing.

What you can do

About polystyrene foam

Polystyrene foam, which is not biodegradable, is most often used in throw-away coffee cups. The argument for using polystyrene foam centers around convenience and the fact that conventional paper cups are also not recyclable due to the inner lining (which is made from petroleum).

However, 100 percent compostable hot cups are now available, providing the same convenience as polystyrene foam. Their inner lining is completely heat-stable. Made from 100 percent corn rather than petroleum, these cups will fully compost under commercial composting conditions in about 60 days.

Clear cold drinking cups that have the same look and feel of clear plastic cups are also available. Made from corn, they will completely compost under commercial composting conditions in just 45 to 60 days.

Encourage staff to use reusable coffee cups

Provide high-quality, reusable mugs, perhaps embossed with the hospital's logo, to all employees. Give these as a new-employee welcome gift at staff orientation or at the completion of their introductory probation period. Eliminate the option of using disposal cups completely except in the take-out area of your cafeteria. Make sure you provide green cleansers for washing the cups.

If you cannot afford to purchase cups for your staff, encourage them to bring their own from home. Provide a discount on beverages at the cafeteria if they bring their own cup, hold a no-paper-cup day to kick off the education about this program and have prizes for staff, such as coffee coupons from a popular coffee shop nearby.

Consider a complete move to reusables, including in the cafeteria

As a second step, and recognizing that this will take some time, consider a complete move to reusable cups and dishware. Although disposable products are often touted as less costly, when a full-product-life-cycle analysis is used, this may not be the case. When doing a cost analysis between a reusable product and its disposable alternative, account for the true cost of using a disposable product, which goes beyond the purchase price. The following formula will help you determine the true cost of using disposables:

Purchase price + cost of waste disposal + occupational health costs + environmental impact + warehousing cost = True cost of disposables

Your quick win to phasing out disposal food service ware — particularly plastics and polystyrene foam — is to start with reusable cups. Often the additional costs of cleaning reusable cups are outweighed just by the savings in purchasing and waste handling. Avoid items made from plastics containing polystyrene, polyvinyl, polyethylene terephthalate or polycarbonate. Instead, choose lead-free ceramic ware or products made from glass, stainless steel, bio-based materials, polyethylene or polypropylene.

Styrofoam® is a trade name for polystyrene thermal insulation, a material manufactured by Dow Chemical Co., that can be identified by its distinctive blue color. Styrofoam can be used for building materials, including insulated sheathing, pipe insulation, and floral and craft products.

Styrofoam is often used as a generic term for expanded polystyrene foam, such as disposable coffee cups, coolers or packaging material, which are typically white and are made of expanded polystyrene beads and are very different from true Styrofoam. The problem is that these cups and packaging materials are not biodegradable and could last for hundreds of years in a landfill.

Mercury reduction

Mercury-containing devices and materials have been an integral part of health care facilities for decades and include thermometers, sphygmomanometers, esophageal dilators, certain laboratory chemicals, medical batteries, cleaning solutions, fluorescent lamps, thermostats,

pressure gauges and electrical switches. Due to the serious effects that mercury exposure and releases can have on human health, source reduction and mercury recycling are now a high priority in many industries, including health care.

What you can do

Start with a pledge

Pledge to take action on mercury reduction and eventual elimination. Your pledge could read:

As a responsible provider of health care services XXX Hospital is committed to the health of our patients, our staff and their communities. We are aware that the health care industry has been identified as a major source of mercury pollution, is known to be hazardous to human health and the environment, and is a potential source of exposure to patients, visitors and staff. We are committed to its immediate reduction and eventual elimination to make our institution a model of environmental responsibility by phasing out the use of mercury and mercury containing products. We understand that this pledge is meant to be both an indication of our commitment to reducing the use of mercury, and of our intention to develop a comprehensive program to eliminate the release of mercury to the environment.

Mercury reduction in seven easy steps

Step 1 – Document and set goals

Create an inventory of mercury-containing products including how much mercury you have and where. Then, develop realistic reduction goals and set a baseline against which you can measure your progress. The California Department of Public Health has a comprehensive, easy-to-use mercury assessment tool that tracks reductions automatically.

Step 2 – Get help

Talk to your hospital leadership and get their commitment to be mercury-free. Establish a mercury-free team with key people from each department who have the authority to make changes.

Step 3 – Manage what you have

Until you are able to eliminate all mercury-containing items in your facility, you should have a comprehensive management plan in place. This plan should include protocols for safe handling, mercury spill clean-up procedures, disposal procedures, education and training of employees about facility protocols and a process to regularly review mercury use, reduction and elimination

progress. It will require you to inventory and label all remaining mercury devices so that you can track your progress to full elimination. Work with Workplace Health and Safety and Environmental Management to create this plan.

Step 4 – Replace mercury-containing products

Mercury-free products that are equivalent to or better in performance than the old mercury devices are now readily available for most applications in health care, including clinical and facility devices, laboratory chemicals and cleaning products. Practice Greenhealth, Inform, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Sustainable Hospitals websites provide information on alternatives. You can:

- Replace mercury thermometers with electronic devices and ensure mercury thermometers are not sold in your outpatient pharmacy
- Phase in sphygmomanometers replacement
- Assess opportunities to purchase thermometry probes for existing electronic devices with the option to replace switches, gauges, thermometers, X-ray tubes, barostats and thermostats over a period of time, tag those that contain mercury and replace them first (in a phased-in process) if possible
- Replace fixatives and stains that contain significant amounts of mercury where alternatives exist; priorities would include B5 fixative, Harris Hematoxylin, Zenker's Solution and Schaudinn's fixative
- Replace mercury-containing cleaning chemicals and pharmaceuticals

Identify and list those chemicals that contain mercury but do not have readily available substitutes. Periodically review this list to determine whether alternatives have become available.

Step 5 – Recycle mercury

Many mercury-containing products can be considered universal wastes to avoid some of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act requirements and allow for recycling. Examples include batteries, pesticides, thermostats and fluorescent lamps, and may also include cathode ray tubes, depending upon your state's universal waste rule.

Step 6 – Keep the mercury out

Work with your purchasing department to make sure that mercury products do not find their way back into the hospital. Establish a mercury-free purchasing policy and require that vendors sign a mercury-content disclosure agreement covering products that you intend to purchase. Then use your mercury inventory (from step 1) to monitor the effectiveness of the policy. Have a mercury-free purchasing policy such as:

-XXX Hospital is committed to minimizing the amount of mercury utilized in its operations, and desires to avoid the acquisition of products that contain mercury whenever feasible alternatives exist that do not compromise patient care. Supplier shall represent and warrant in the purchase agreement and with the submission of this proposal that the products proposed to be furnished under any agreement do not contain mercury, except as identified and listed in an exhibit to this proposal. Supplier shall specify the amount of mercury contained in any products listed in this exhibit and indicate in the proposal if a feasible mercury-free alternative is available.

Step 7 – Celebrate your success

Giving recognition for work along the way is often a critical component of its continued success. Publish stories in your staff newsletter and your local media, and apply for awards such as Practice Greenhealth's Making Medicine Mercury Free award.

What is mercury?

Mercury is a heavy metal, sometimes known as quicksilver, that occurs naturally in the environment in different chemical forms. The pure form, elemental mercury, is liquid at room temperature and slowly forms a vapor in the air. Mercury is typically encountered in one of three forms:

- Metallic liquid, also called elemental mercury, found in thermometers, sphygmomanometers and in dental fillings
- Inorganic mercury salts, found in mercury batteries
- Organic mercury compounds, such as methyl mercury, produced by micro-organisms and found in fish and other foods

The Vizient Environmentally Preferred Sourcing (EPS) Program offers members supply and service cost savings through more than 36,000 supplier agreements. EPS suppliers have verified EPS attributes and provide products that can support members' sustainability objectives. This toolkit is a resource to help members create or enhance their sustainability programs.

As the nation's largest member-driven health care performance improvement company, Vizient provides network-powered insights in the critical areas of clinical, operational, and supply chain performance and empowers members to deliver exceptional, cost-effective care.



To learn more, contact us at eps@vizientinc.com.