



Greening Medical Facilities

Facts and Resources

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- \$30 billion annually will be spent on new biomedical research facilities and supplies at campuses, which reflects a their amount of leverage to lead and affect change on campus.
- Opportunities exist to reduce solid waste and prevent unnecessary equipment and chemical purchases, as well as to purchase and use mercury and PVC-free products and to buy substitutes for mercury-containing chemicals.
- Medical waste incinerators are the 2nd largest source of dioxin and the 4th largest source of mercury pollution nationwide.
- The amount of mercury generated every year in municipal solid waste systems from thermometers alone is 17 tons. It takes 1 gram of mercury to contaminate a 20 acre lake.
- 584 medical facilities nationwide have pledged to virtually eliminate mercury waste by 2005.
- All 39 hospitals in the state of Maine have agreed to phase-out mercury and reduce the use of PVC plastic.
- The California Medical Association and the Massachusetts Medical Society resolved in 2000 to call for policies that will lead toward the eventual elimination of mercury from incinerator waste streams.
- A strategy that reduces the waste stream and toxic releases of a medical facility will save time and money, and will further the greater mission of the medical profession: the promotion and creation of a healthy society.

Online Contacts and Resources

- **Health Care Without Harm:** <http://www.noharm.org>
- **Sustainable Hospitals Project:** <http://www.sustainablehospitals.org> (great for purchasing!)
- **Healthcare Environet, Canada:** <http://www.c2p2online.com> (under 'Tools and Resources')
- **EPA**
 - Mercury in Medical Facilities: <http://www.epa.gov/seahome/mercury/src/title.htm>
 - Mercury Study Report to Congress: <http://www.epa.gov/oar/mercury.html>

Model Facilities

- **Beth Israel Hospital**—By implementing a waste segregation program, Beth Israel has reduced its waste stream and cut its disposal costs by 60%, saving \$600,000 on medical waste disposal and \$900,000 on all trash disposal per year.
- **Albany Medical Center**—Albany Medical Center began a program that in its first six years has recycled 16 million pounds of waste and saved the hospital \$4 million, and is now recycling 43% of its total waste stream. They also closed their incinerator and installed a chemical distillery that converts waste materials into pure products that the AMC can use in its labs, saving \$250,000 per year in disposal and chemical purchasing costs.
- **University of Minnesota-Duluth**—Made an agreement with a local hospital to achieve zero-discharge of persistent toxic substances. The University reports that phasing-out mercury use has significantly reduced costs of hazardous spill cleanups. They have instituted micro-scale projects in undergraduate chemistry and research labs that dramatically reduce the quantities of chemicals used, purchased and discarded. One professor was able to reduce solvent waste from 2,500 gallons to 23 gallons, saving \$37,000 annually. Students also helped identify sources of mercury pollution and teachers came up with new laboratory methods to deal with them.
- **SUNY-Buffalo**—Volunteer building coordinators turn off lights and equipment each day and help educate building occupants. The University kept energy costs constant on one campus since 1993 while constructing 6 new buildings and expanding the campus by 20%. \$60 million dollars are saved each year as a result of this project, and CO2 emissions are reduced by over 63 million lbs. every year.
- **University of Wisconsin-Madison**—Posts inventories of available office and lab equipment and chemicals on the web. UW has redistributed 1,000 tons of lab equipment in a year, saving up to \$240,000 in avoided annual purchase and disposal costs.
- **University of Washington**—Redistributes 1,400 lbs. of chemicals through its computerized chemical exchange program, saving \$2,900/year through avoided disposal costs.

Sources

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