

HOSPITALS AND THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY



Introduction

It's been reported that American hospitals generate approximately 6,600 tons of waste per day. As much as 85% of that is non-hazardous solid waste, such as paper, cardboard, food waste, metal, glass, and plastics. An integrated waste reduction and recycling strategy will help better manage your facility's waste stream. Therefore, there is a substantial economic incentive for implementing programs to reduce waste, including reduced disposal costs and, possibly, income generated from recycling.

Resources

At a national level:

Practice Greenhealth

[Practice Greenhealth](#) is a national membership and networking organization for institutions in the healthcare community that are committed to sustainable, eco-friendly practices. Members include hospitals, healthcare systems, businesses and other stakeholders engaged in the greening of healthcare to improve the health of patients, staff and the environment. Their main page is: More specific web information on Recycling can be found [here](#). They also have excellent information and guidance on [Waste Reduction](#), and on [Waste Management](#).

There are also several other areas on this website that deal with pharmaceutical waste management, Chemical Management, composting, recycling, and donation in [Food Services](#) and waste prevention in [Environmentally Preferable Purchasing](#). All waste management strategies should start with environmentally preferable purchasing and follow the order of reduce, reuse, and finally, recycle.

At the State level:

Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

The MDEQ provides guidance on materials to recycle, collection or storage containers needed, and equipment needed to operate a [hospital recycling program](#) as well as how to process and market recyclable materials, how to educate participants in a recycling program, and where cost savings can be realized from establishing a hospital recycling program.

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PDEP)

The PDEP also provides tips for recycling materials found in the hospital waste stream.

Recycling Works Tip Sheet: Hospitals and Health Care Institutions at:

<http://www.dep.state.pa.us/dep/deputate/airwaste/wm/RECYCLE/Tips/Hospitals.htm>

Case Studies

The Practice Greenhealth program website offers the following success stories: In 1992, the Itasca Medical Center in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, was a 108-bed community hospital with an attached 35-bed convalescent nursing care facility. “As a result of reduction actions alone, the hospital personnel is preventing 238 cubic yards and over 10,700 pounds of waste. Not including the savings from avoided disposal fees, these actions result in an \$11,030 yearly cost savings for the hospital.”

“St Joseph’s Medical Center in California reduced the amount of solid waste going to the landfill by 52 tons in 2004, and recycled more than 128 tons of waste – largely paper, but also pallets, cardboard, and green waste recycling – approximately 21% of the system’s total waste stream.”

“St Elizabeth Medical Center in Edgewood, Kentucky, reduced paper usage by thousands of sheets through placement of all Administrative, Human Resources, and Nursing Policies and Procedures, as well as their Safety and Infection Control Manual and over 4000 MSDS sheets, on their intranet system instead of making paper copies for multiple binders in numerous departments.