

H2E 10 STEP GUIDE TO



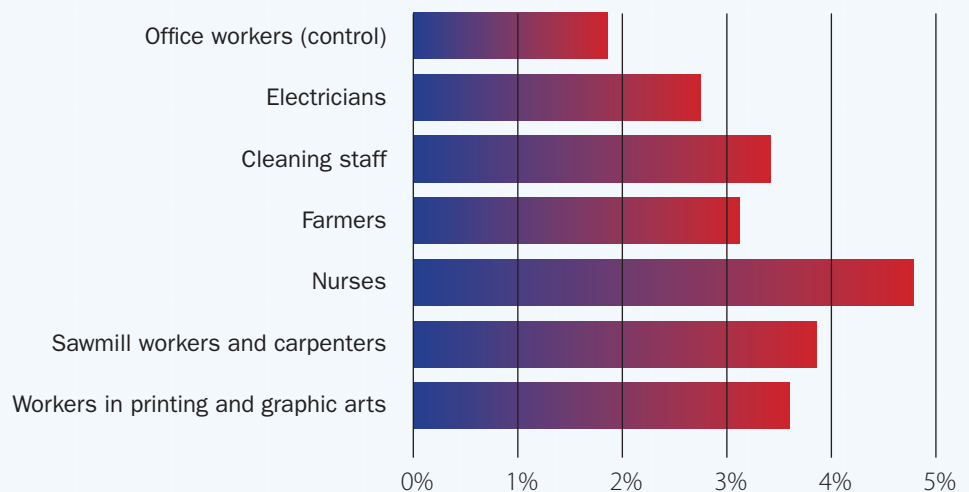
Creating the Environmental Imperative in Healthcare

A Guide for Healthcare Executives

The impacts of healthcare on the environment are notable. The healthcare sector spends more than \$8.3 billion on energy each year,¹ and hospitals are consistently within the top ten water users in their communities.² At the same time, healthcare facilities use an array of toxic chemicals—from cleaning products to chemotherapy drugs—and generate thousands of tons of solid and medical waste each year. As science has begun to emerge documenting the growing effect of low-level chemical exposures on infants, children, and fertility, a new study in the *Lancet* reveals that nurses have the highest incidence of work-related asthma of any occupation studied, followed closely by cleaning staff.³

Consistent with their ethical imperative to “first, do no harm,” healthcare organizations have an obligation to address aspects of their operations that have the potential to negatively impact the health of patients, staff, and the community. The healthcare sector is increasingly recognizing the critical link between human health and environmental health, and is choosing to act upon this knowledge. In response, many hospitals are developing organization-wide programs that dramatically reduce the effect of their facility’s operations on the environment while concurrently saving money and minimizing liability and compliance risks.

ASTHMA CASES ACCORDING TO OCCUPATION³



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While the kinds of healthcare facilities leading the way in environmental excellence range from rural, critical access hospitals in Idaho to sprawling metropolitan hospitals in the medical mecca of Boston, these facilities share one important common thread that is integral to their successes—senior level engagement, support, and leadership. Healthcare executives play a critical role in helping these programs come to fruition.

Commitment is the first step. Once the healthcare organization makes a commitment to environmental excellence, there are several concrete actions that senior executives can take to ensure the success of these new programs and initiatives. The following ten steps are a framework for senior level engagement.

Step One: Announce senior-level support for environmental stewardship as part of your organization's community health mission.

Approve an overarching *Statement of Environmental Principles* as a core value for the organization, to guide philosophy and operations related to a broad range of environmental considerations. Commitment from the administration reassures staff that these programs are supported at the highest levels of the organization. The *Statement of Environmental Principles* should also be used to highlight the organization's commitment to community benefit and community health, as well as to corporate social responsibility.

Step Two: Commit your healthcare organization to becoming an H2E Partner.

Support your organization in joining a national community of hospitals and healthcare facilities that are working together to identify best management practices and environmental strategies for the entire sector. Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) provides your organization with the practical solutions, tools, education, and technical assistance necessary to implement comprehensive environmental programs in a healthcare setting, and can help actualize the commitments outlined in the *Statement of Environmental Principles*.

Step Three: Support the creation of the infrastructure necessary to evaluate and improve environmental programs.

Environmental programs, like any other programmatic area, require strategic planning. Charge an existing committee, or create a "Green Team", to evaluate current programs and create facility-wide goals and an action plan. The committee should include representatives from senior management and report to leadership on outcomes related to the facility goals. Suggested participation:

- a. Safety
- b. Environmental Services
- c. Engineering
- d. Infection Control
- e. Nursing
- f. Purchasing/Materials Management
- g. Risk Management
- h. Laboratory
- i. Pharmacy
- j. Physician Liaison
- k. Marketing
- l. Occupational Health
- m. Environmental Health and Safety
- n. Food Services/Dietary
- o. Additional clinical departments where necessary, such as OR, ED, or NICU

Step Four: Hire a Sustainability Director to lead and coordinate environmental initiatives throughout the organization.

Developing and implementing new environmental programs can be challenging, and involves degree of coordination between a number of disciplinary areas. Hospital departments often operate in silos, and coordinating a change in work practices can be difficult. Healthcare organizations that have had the greatest successes in creating an environmentally responsible organization have done so primarily through the guidance and oversight of a facility-wide point person. Organizations often find that this person "pays for themselves" through the cost-savings and efficiencies that result from a focus on environmental performance.

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Step Five: Understand where your facility is starting from—develop a baseline.

Task the assigned Committee and/or the Sustainability Director with a facility-wide audit of waste data and environmental programs to identify current reporting relationships, compliance concerns, and initiatives already underway. Use the data to determine a facility baseline and performance metrics, which can then be compared to national H2E benchmarking information to assess progress and determine priorities for action.

Step Six: Direct Materials Management/Purchasing to purchase more environmentally responsible products and services.

Environmentally preferable purchasing, or EPP, is an integral part of “greening” your facility. EPP is a proactive approach to environmental management—an attempt to look upstream at what is coming in the door versus just handling waste and toxic substances at the “back door” of the facility. Materials Management/Purchasing should work with your organization’s group purchasing organization (GPO) to select more environmentally preferable products. Incorporating environmental attributes into the product evaluation or value analysis process is critical, in addition to developing supportive policies and educating department heads, physicians, and nurse managers on the environmental imperative behind the new evaluation framework.

Step Seven: Integrate environmental considerations into any new building design, construction, or facility renovation project.

Emerging research demonstrates that green building strategies add value to healthcare organizations beyond an improved environmental footprint, including the potential for fewer medication errors, decreased pain medication, shorter patient stays/faster recovery times, reduced infection rates,

increased staff retention, and lower rates of occupational asthma.⁴ Evaluate the feasibility of designing and building a green healthcare facility as early as possible in the development process. Support the creation of an Integrated Design Team based on recommendations in the Green Guide for Health Care,⁵ that includes representation from departments often overlooked at the design table such as Environmental Services, Facility Management, and Nursing.

Step Eight: Direct Marketing/Public Relations to create awareness of the facility’s environmental commitment and achievements within the local community.

Creating an environmentally sustainable healthcare organization not only provides benefits to human and environmental health, it can also be an opportunity to create a market advantage. Be sure to have Marketing/Public Relations share your organization’s story and efforts with the community. In addition, many facilities are adding a branding aspect to their environmental programs—creating marketing slogans, posters and stickers that tie in with their environmental focus. This strategy successfully highlights the facility’s commitment for patients, staff and visitors.

Step Nine: Track environmental performance metrics each year against H2E benchmarks and report annually on progress.

Like other strategic goals of the organization, it is important to track progress in environmental improvement. The assigned committee and/or Sustainability Director should report annually on progress to-date, including a synopsis of the facility’s annual goals, programs underway, any worker exposures or regulatory infractions, and key environmental performance metrics that can be compared each year with national H2E benchmarks. Including highlights of the facility’s environmental achievements in the Annual Report is also a good way create transparency, build goodwill and demonstrate commitment to the organization’s community benefit or corporate social responsibility programs.

Creating and sustaining an outstanding environmental program in a healthcare organization can be challenging, but with support from senior leadership, it can—and is—being done.

Step Ten: Apply for an H2E Environmental Excellence Award each year to get recognition for achieving annual environmental goals.

Get national recognition for all of the organization's hard work. Direct the assigned committee and/or Sustainability Director to apply for an H2E Environmental Excellence award—the premier awards program recognizing environmental leadership in healthcare. The application process provides an incentive to determine environmental performance metrics each year, and receiving an award honors staff for a job well done, while providing another opportunity to get positive press in the local community.

Creating and sustaining an outstanding environmental program in a healthcare organization can be challenging, but with support from senior leadership, it can—and is—being done. For more information on how to get started, contact H2E and learn how your organization can commit to making healthcare *healthier* through the integration of sound, cost-effective environmental programs.

E N D N O T E S

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5. Green Guide for Health Care. Version 2.2. *Integrated Design Credit, Pre-Requisite 1: Integrated Design Process, and Pre-Requisite 2: Health, Mission Statement and Program*. Available at: www.gghc.org

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Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) is a non-profit organization committed to improving environmental performance in the healthcare sector, and was formed in partnership with the American Hospital Association, the American Nurses Association, the US Environmental Protection Agency and Health Care Without Harm.