



# A Prescription to Prevent Waste in Hospitals and Clinics

**To combat the spread of disease, many medical facilities have adopted a “new is better” philosophy. Unfortunately, this can discourage material reduction and reuse practices. While it is important to ensure a healthy environment, it is estimated that at least 75% of all wastes from these facilities are noninfectious - suggesting that reuse, for example, is a viable option for cutting waste and costs. Due to the wide range of services provided, hospitals and clinics have numerous opportunities for applying waste prevention strategies. Listed below are some specific ideas for various facility areas.**

## Labs and Exam and Operating Rooms

- Switch to reusable items such as goggles, surgical gowns and drapes, ice packs and prep sets.
- Use rechargeable, nickel-cadmium batteries instead of alkaline batteries to power medical equipment like ophthalmoscopes.

## Patient Rooms and Cafeterias

- Use cloth diapers instead of plastic diapers.
- Reuse items such as bedpans, patient gowns, emesis basins, pillows and underpads in patients' rooms.
- Don't throw away unused personal items like aspirin, tissues and shampoo. Instead, have nurses evaluate these items for reuse in other patient rooms or offer them to patients upon discharge.
- Use reusable utensils, plates and bowls for meal service.
- Institute a reusable mug program for employees with incentives such as beverage discounts.

## Offices and Warehouse

- Distribute reports electronically instead of in hard-copy form.
- Encourage double-sided copies for record keeping and correspondence.
- Use microfiche and consolidate patient records to save space and paper.
- Recharge toner cartridges and printer ribbons instead of throwing them out.
- Use reusable plastic totes for transporting medical records and supplies between facilities.
- Purchase items in bulk to reduce packaging waste. Also, reuse packaging whenever possible.
- Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs in work areas.

## How Waste Prevention Can Save Money

While many cost-saving, waste prevention strategies have no up-front costs, some require an initial capital investment (such as purchasing cloth diapers or underpads). However, long-term savings can be realized in the form of reduced disposal and/or purchasing costs. These savings can offset this initial investment and may even lead to overall savings - putting money back into the budget.

## Keys To A Successful Program

- ❑ Obtain support from upper management in instituting the waste prevention program as well as the environmental services department in maintaining the program.
- ❑ Designate a competent and enthusiastic coordinator to oversee the incorporation of waste prevention strategies and monitor the successes and failures of the program.
- ❑ Organize an environmental committee to promote the program and troubleshoot problems.
- ❑ Apply infection-control guidelines to reduction and reuse strategies in order to prevent the spread of disease.

## Where to Get More Information

The following is a partial list of relevant Web sites and fact sheets. Copies of the fact sheets are available by contacting the Resource Venture at (206) 389-7304.

- **Medical Industry Waste Prevention Roundtable**  
[www.nwmedicalwaste.org](http://www.nwmedicalwaste.org)  
A local group that brings together professionals in the medical industry who are interested in exchanging ideas on, and working to develop new ways of, preventing and reducing waste.
- **Health Care Without Harm**  
[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)  
This organization promotes comprehensive pollution prevention practices, supports the development and use of environmentally safe materials, technology and products and educates health care institutions, providers, workers and consumers about the environmental and public health impacts of the health care industry and solutions to its problems.
- **Eleven Recommendations for Improving Health Care Waste Management**  
[www.noharm.org/library/docs/Eleven\\_Recommendations\\_for\\_Improving\\_Health\\_Ca.htm](http://www.noharm.org/library/docs/Eleven_Recommendations_for_Improving_Health_Ca.htm)  
A fact sheet with recommendations to stimulate better planning and action programs at the municipal government level and at the level of individual health care facilities.

- **The Nightingale Institute for Health and the Environment**

[www.nihe.org](http://www.nihe.org)

An organization working to change the practices of health professionals for a more environmentally sustainable health care delivery system worldwide.

- **Sustainable Hospitals Project, University of Massachusetts at Lowell**

[www.sustainablehospitals.org/cgi-bin/DB\\_Index.cgi](http://www.sustainablehospitals.org/cgi-bin/DB_Index.cgi)

This project provides technical support to the healthcare industry for selecting products and work practices that reduce occupational and environmental hazards, maintain quality patient care and contain costs.

## At Your Service

The Resource Venture provides free environmental consulting services to Seattle-area businesses. We help companies lower their utility costs, obtain rebates, comply with regulations and receive public recognition, all while protecting the environment. Since 1990, the Resource Venture has helped thousands of businesses recycle, use less water, prevent stormwater pollution and build sustainably. We are a program of the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with Seattle Public Utilities.



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