

Case Study of Cincinnati Children's Hospital Recycling

In April of 2007, Cincinnati Children's Hospital initiated a successful hospital-wide recycling program. They collect plastic, aluminum, steel, glass, paper, and cardboard from all employee work areas, the cafeteria, and public gathering spaces. Within the first few months, Cincinnati Children's received such an overwhelming response from employees they had to increase their capacity from one to four 6-yard recycling containers.

Cincinnati Children's at a Glance

- Established in 1883
- Full-service, not-for-profit pediatric academic medical center with 475 licensed beds
- Vision: to be the leader in improving child health
- Patient Encounters = 842,822
- Total Employees = 9,142

Confronting the Challenge

Ten months before the program became a reality, several hospital employees began investigating why Cincinnati Children's did not recycle hospital-wide. They faced a challenge ahead of them. The main campus comprises multiple buildings and over 9,000 employees in dozens of different departments. Past attempts to start a comprehensive recycling program had failed leaving some administration and employees skeptical about the idea.

Create Partnerships and Recruit Help

These challenges did not dissuade a few determined Cincinnati Children's employees. These individuals teamed up with Cincinnati Children's Environmental Services Division to research the feasibility of recycling and examine what environmental initiatives the hospital had adopted

already. They then formed the Go Green Team, an assembly of representatives from key departments, such as food service, purchasing, and grounds, as well as, employees interested in making Cincinnati Children's more environmentally friendly.

Go Green Team Committees

- Recycling Off Campus
- Green Building & H2E*
- Roof Top Garden
- Education & Resource
- Recycling 4 Research

**Hospitals for a Healthy Environment*

The original five employees at the first Go Green Team meeting grew to about 50 currently active members. The Go Green Team success relies on volunteer members taking a genuinely active role. These members choose to work in five subcommittees to better focus and organize their efforts.

The Go Green Team also recruited help from outside of the hospital. The Hamilton County Solid Waste District, Keep Cincinnati Beautiful, and Rumpke Recycling provided expert knowledge about recycling, as well as, the necessary supplies to start a program. Christ Hospital offered a tour of their facility and first-hand advice of how they implemented recycling. Using Christ Hospital as a model and armed with outside support, the Go Green Team was prepared to gain the necessary approval from upper management.

Attain Top Management Support

A successful recycling program needs the support of the highest level of administration. Several Go Green Team members tried initiating recycling a few years ago, but the program did not go far because they lacked support from the directors.

The Go Green Team received a written quote of support from President and CEO Jim Anderson to use in future internal newsletters and press releases if necessary. Top management support not only means the program will receive funding, but it also means that employees will be more likely to participate.

Make Recycling Easy

Before going hospital-wide, the Go Green Team initiated a pilot recycling project in the Gastroenterology Division to work out the kinks of collection. They needed to gather evidence that a hospital-wide program would work and be sure employees would buy into recycling. Almost all employees in the division participated and were amazed at how little garbage was left in their trash bin.

During the pilot, the Go Green Team developed an easy collection system. Divisions request a blue recycling container and Cincinnati Children's Environmental Services Division picks up the recyclables. Employees can recycle everything they do at home, reducing the need for extensive employee education. The easier the program, the more likely employees will participate.

Maintain the Energy

To kick-off Cincinnati Children's hospital-wide recycling program, the Go Green Team set up a booth outside of the cafeteria during Earth Week (April 23-27, 2007), where they handed out information to employees and distributed raffle prizes while wearing Go Green Team shirts. Food Services pitched in by offering free coffee in the cafeteria to employees using reusable mugs. The Child Life Division coordinated a week of environmental education in their classrooms. To wrap up the week, an article about recycling circulated in the employee newsletter and an email describing the program was sent to every employee.

The Go Green Team has also sustained the momentum of the recycling program by taking on additional efforts to make Cincinnati Children's as environmentally friendly as possible. One committee is exploring how to start recycling at more than a dozen off-campus branches. Other committees are working to establish a roof top garden and researching ways to implement green building techniques throughout the hospital. The Go Green Team also organized a Green Vendor Fair for researchers to learn about available environmentally preferable options.

Quantify the Results

Aside from spurring other positive projects like the roof top garden and green vendor fair, Cincinnati Children's has received positive feedback from employees, visitors, and the community at large for their recycling efforts. Employees now recycle enough material to fill four 6-yard recycling containers and a separate cardboard compactor with recyclables. In the first 6 months, Cincinnati Children's recycled 9 ½ tons of materials saving:

- 83 trees
- 19 barrels of oil (enough to run the average car 11,970 miles)
- Enough energy to power five homes for an entire year
- 30.4 cubic yards of landfill space
- 11.8 tons of air pollution

If you would like assistance starting a recycling program in your organization, call the Hamilton County Solid Waste Management District at (513) 946-7789. We can help you design a customized recycling plan and explain the recycling options in the area.