

# Environmentalism Gets Active



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In an era when environmental issues can no longer be ignored, environmental warriors are essential in the promotion of pro-environmental behaviors. The passionate members of the Green Committee make up our very own institution's environmental army. This summer, the members of the Green Committee and several recruits tackled several environmental issues at our institution.

## Blue Bin, Green Bin, Brown Bin, Garbage?

In 2007, our institution created nearly 300 garbage bags a day, but 40% of the "garbage" was actually recyclable or compostable material.

To improve recycling and composting know-how, we created a contest called "Where Does It Go?" Over 150 staff members participated at the Wellness Fair or at staff meetings. Results showed some confusion about what can be recycled and composted at our institution. The items with the most wrong answers were batteries (68% of people were wrong), a dirty paper plate (44% wrong), and a paper coffee cup (41% wrong).

Running this contest helped us answer participants' questions about disposal procedures. Prizes were awarded to employees with perfect scores. Thank you to all of those who participated; your cooperation and enthusiasm for this issue was especially encouraging!

## Garbage Audit

Unfortunately, a systematic inspection of the contents of garbage bags showed that 50% of the contents could have been diverted to recycling or composting. Office areas continue to be among the worst offenders.

The good news is that we are throwing out fewer bags of garbage. In the last week of August 2008, there was an average of 225 garbage bags thrown out every day, 20% less than in last summer's count.

The biggest change came from Dietary Services. Because it was such a big change, Dietary employees themselves did a re-count in September to check the numbers. Their figures confirmed that Dietary has reduced its garbage - by nearly 50%!

As the biggest producer of garbage at our institution, changes in the way Dietary Services manage waste can have a big impact on our environmental and financial costs. This year, they re-introduced washable cups with meals for Regional clients, which will prevent about 200,000 polystyrene cups going to the landfill each year! Hospital statistics show there have been no cases of harm or security concerns involving washable cups, and we look forward to their use at Oak Ridge soon.

Housekeeping Services are now working with Dietary Services to devise convenient composting facilities and timely removal of composting bins.

## Carpooling

The Green Committee also teamed up with the Wellness Coordinator to organize the first annual Active Transportation Day. Active transportation is human-powered transportation (e.g., running, walking, cycling, skating or skateboarding) and also embraces carpooling. All these methods help to reduce our carbon footprint. By encouraging employees to use these methods, we hope to install long-term changes in employees' physical activity and reduce dependence on motor vehicles.

On other summer days, only 1% of our employees walked, ran, or biked to work. On Active Transportation Day, that number rose to 5%. Active participants were entered into a prize draw. Special mention goes to Steve St. Amant for the longest distance by human power and the IT "Go-Getters" for packing a car!

## The Challenge

It is easy to turn a blind eye to environmental degradation or to think there is nothing we can do. It's true that big changes cannot be achieved by groups like the Green Committee alone. However, if everyone makes a personal commitment today to change one environmental behaviour, no matter how small or large, our employees can and will make a difference!

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