

“Go Green!”

Traditionally in Michigan that proclamation is associated with support for the Michigan State University Spartans – and usually followed by a chorus of “M Go Blue!” in support of the state’s other Big Ten member, the University of Michigan. However, these days “Go Green!” has taken on a new life at the Michigan Department of Community Health.

At the MDCH Laboratories, the “Go Green!” mantra has workers finding innovative ways to lessen their impact on the environment. “Go Green!” has become more than a motto – it’s become a way of life and *the* way to do business.

Inspired by concerns about the effects of global warming and the energy crisis, the MDCH Bureau of Laboratories has partnered with the state’s Department of Management and Budget and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, co-occupant of the lab building. Together, the three departments have begun their green journey by taking simple but meaningful steps to decrease energy consumption and reduce waste streams leaving the building.

“It started around the summer of 2008 with a few scientists asking if we could do more recycling. From there I asked DMB about how much energy we use to power this building,” said Dr. Frances Pouch Downes, director of the MDCH Bureau of Laboratories.

When the DMB provided monthly electricity and natural gas use and costs to the lab, MDCH employees were shocked. The lab, built in 1994, consumed more than \$70,000 worth of energy each month. That meant, generally speaking, the lab utility costs were about 300% more than that of a typical office building of the same size. Employees viewed the news as a call to action.

MDCH scientists and Downes invited the DEQ and DMB to join them in forming a Green Team. The goal was to increase recycling, reduce waste and energy use, and expand use of reusable and renewable materials.

The Green Team provided baseline data on energy use and recycled materials as well as a proposal designed to green up the lab and motivate employees to participate in the movement. In fact, the team even offered suggestions for creating a healthier work place and work force. As a result, property improvements are being made to encourage employees to use break and lunch times to go outside and walk.

As the Green Team explored green opportunities, it identified actions that can be taken at the personal, lab unit, administrative and facility management levels. (*See box*) This information was made available to all employees and posted on the MDCH Intranet.

Before the Green Team formed, used lab materials, supplies, and specimen shipping containers filled the hallways daily waiting for janitorial service contractors to haul them to the trash. The DMB already had a cardboard, newspaper and office paper recycling

program in place, so now Styrofoam has been added to the DMB recycling program. Volunteers from the MDCH and DEQ also share responsibility for taking brown glass, batteries and box board to a local recycling center, and the janitorial contractor is investigating incorporating a stop at the lab on its way to the recycling center.

Ideas and volunteer efforts continue to grow as individuals recognize their peers have changed habits. The Green Team recently added No. 5 plastics, aluminum foil, brown paper, and more to its recycling agenda.

Downes points out that Michigan has joined a growing green movement among labs across the country.

“Other public health labs are also pursuing reductions in energy use and waste,” said Downes, who is president of the Association of Public Health Laboratories.

For example, in Texas a successful recycling program resulted in a 30% decrease in trash volume. The design of a new facility for the Utah laboratory will include an energy park with wind and geothermal energy generation to power the lab, and public health laboratory facilities in Colorado and Arizona have been retrofitted to meet LEED certification.

In Michigan, going green has become part of the lab’s culture as employees are recognized for their green efforts – large and small. The Green Team already has had a significant impact on the lab, not to mention the environment. As we move forward you can be certain the Green Team will have the entire lab looking for new ways to “Go Green!”

Examples of Green Activities to Consider Whenever Feasible and Safe			
Personal	Lab Unit	Administrative	Facility Management
Use task lights or minimal overhead lighting	Provide space and containers for expanded recycling	Include promotion of and activities in Green Team in performance evaluations	Expand contract with recycling vendor to include additional materials
Lower sashes on fume hoods while not in use	Replace traditional reagents with non-hazardous alternatives	Include language in contracts requiring vendors to use recyclable or reusable packaging	Install motion sensors on conference room and restroom light switches
Run refrigerators and freezers full	Investigate alternate procedures using lower volumes of hazardous chemicals	Provide Intranet space for posting surplus supplies and equipment for internal re-deployment	Provide bike racks and bus stop shelters
Separate white and mixed papers for recycling	Include Green Team activities as an item on staff meeting agendas	Replace old refrigerators and freezers with energy efficient models	Regulate workspace temperatures to eliminate space heaters and fans
Reuse paper that is clean on one side or print 2-sided documents	Reuse sterilized or cleaned specimen shipping containers	Recognize exemplary Green performance of individuals and teams with "Energy Star" awards	Include use of non-toxic cleaning materials requirements in janitorial contracts
Replace distilled water with RO or deionized water			