



PORTLAND
VAMC

FALL 2013

GEMS Newsletter



YOUR GEMS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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- Joe Brooks
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- Melisse Kuhn

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- Heather Parman
- Jessica Robb

Specialty Clinics

- LaShelle Jackson

A Message From the GEMS Coordinator

This year has been very successful for GEMS. We continued our progress on waste reduction efforts, implementing an EKG recycling program, providing in-services to various areas to improve their recycling bins and signage. See page two for this years recycling data. We were able to generate revenue for the 2nd year in a row by revamping the scrap metal, cardboard, and platinum tip recycling programs. Through this revenue we were able to purchase the new Smart Sinks for medication disposal, new recycling stations, and battery recycling boxes.

Our target and objectives for last fiscal year, were very effective. We were able to replace the carpet for the medical center to a recyclable product for all future carpet purchases. Also, our omni cell supply reduction program was able to

reduce the average usage on all products tracked, the super sponge, bath wipes, and facial tissue, just by providing education. Finally, the patient medication program was very positive as well, creating brochures for patients to show them new areas for medication disposal, having patient bring a list of medications instead of all of their medications in during their appointments, and scheduling a take back day for October, 2013. See page three for details on the medication take back event.

Wendy Trapp
GEMS Coordinator

In This Issue:

<i>Recycling Year end reporting</i>	<i>Page 2</i>
<i>First Ever Medication Take Back Day</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
<i>Water Sense</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>Home energy conservation</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Indoor Air Quality</i>	<i>Page 6</i>



RECYCLING

Fiscal Year End Report-How did we do?

- ◆ Disposed of approximately 4.83 tons of non-hazardous pharmaceuticals and kept them out of the landfills and waters.
- ◆ Achieved attendance rate of 80% for at least 20 members of the committee.
- ◆ Completed 100% of GEMS significant aspects and impacts to identify new environmental concerns in each department.
- ◆ Remained above 85% completion rate for GEMS Awareness training all year.
- ◆ Decreased total waste by 29% from FY 2012.
- ◆ Decreased solid waste by 25% from FY 2012.
- ◆ Generated \$22, 757 in recycling revenues for FY 2013.
- ◆ Recycled 115 tons of comingled waste including cardboard
- ◆ Recycled 88 tons of mixed paper.
- ◆ Composted 72.8 tons of food waste.



First Medication Take Back Event



Portland VA Medical Center had its first medication take back day on Thursday, October 24, 2013. In conjunction with the National Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) take back day, our facility wanted to lead and participate. The GEMS Committee, Pharmacy, and Police worked with local law enforcement and the DEA to accept all prescription medications from Veterans and their families as well as employees. Having an event like this keeps medications from being improperly disposed in the water and the trash, which is important for our environment and to protect the community from drug misuse. The facility hopes to continue these efforts quarterly, so stay tuned for the next date to bring your medications in.



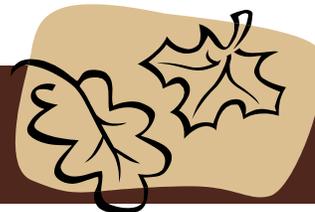
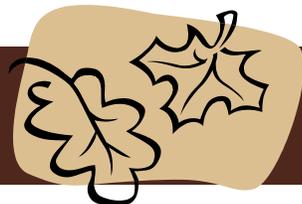
Water Sense

Did you know only 1% of the earth's water is available for people's everyday use? Though 75% of the earth's surface is covered by water, most of it is salt water, locked in inaccessible locations underground or frozen in glaciers. Though it may seem hard to believe, the average person uses 100 gallons of water per day—that's enough to fill 1600 drinking glasses. This water use can easily be cut by as much as 30% by taking a few simple steps:

- ◆ The average water faucet flows at a rate of 2 gallons per minute. By simply turning off your faucet while brushing your teeth in the morning and at night, you can save more than 100 gallons per person each month.
- ◆ Taking a 5 minute shower used 10-25 gallons of water, while a full tub requires about 70 gallons. If you do take a bath, stopper the drain immediately and adjust the temperature as you fill the tub.
- ◆ A leaky toilet can waste about 200 gallons of water every day. To tell if your toilet is leaking, place drop of food coloring in the tank; if the color shows in the bowl without flushing, you have a leak.
- ◆ If your toilet is from 1992 or earlier, you probably have an inefficient model that uses between 3.5 to 7 gallons per flush. New, high efficiency models use less than 1.3 gallons per flush, that's 60% to 80% less water than their less efficient counterparts.

US Environmental Protection Agency, Water Sense Program

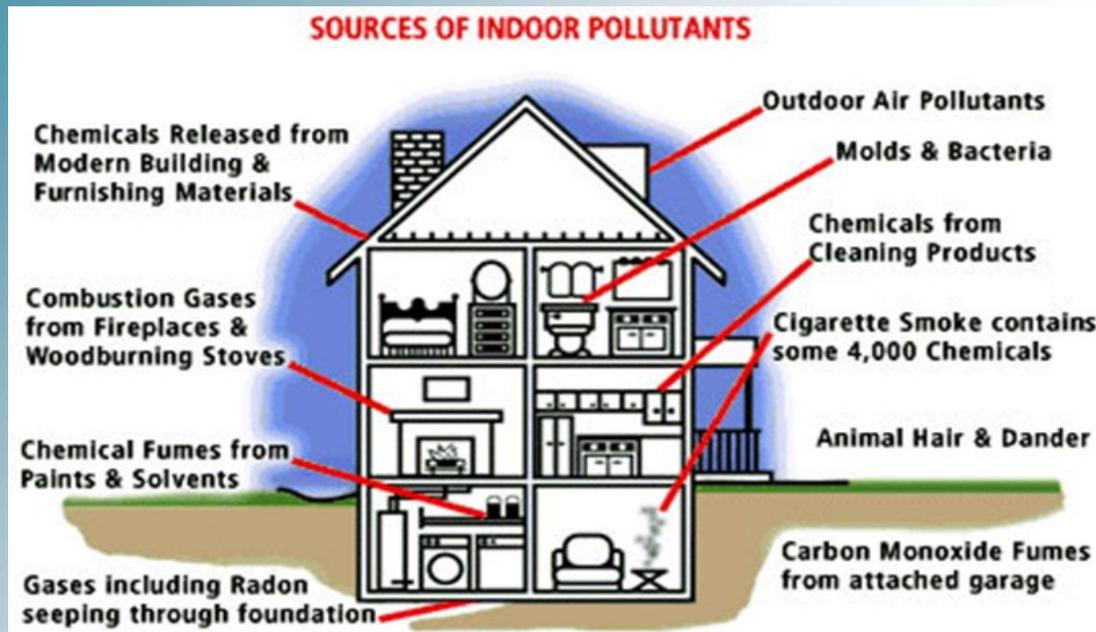
HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION



- If you haven't already, conduct an [energy assessment](#) to find out where you can save the most, and consider making a larger investment for long-term energy savings.
- When you are asleep or out of the house, turn your thermostat back 10° to 15° for eight hours and save around 10% a year on your heating and cooling
- Put plastic or curtains, drapes to cover drafty windows
- Add caulk or weather strips to seal air leaks around doors
- Provide adequate maintenance on your heating systems
- Keep the fire damper closed unless a fire is burning.
- Consider turning down your water heater to 120 degrees.
- Use LED holiday lights

Ron Higgins, Energy Manager and www.energy.gov

Indoor Air Quality Tips



Now that colder weather has set in, most of us will be spending most of our time indoors. And since this is Portland, it's looking like it'll be another nine months of perpetual downpour. Whether it's firing up the wood stove, or power-cycling through your video queue, chances are we're going to be spending the majority of our time under a roof of some kind. Awareness of indoor air quality is often seen as secondary, and this is a good time of the year to review safe practices for your home and health.

Indoor Air Pollution may include:

Carbon Monoxide: a toxic, odorless and colorless gas

Secondhand smoke

Mold and pet dander

Radon: An odorless, tasteless gas that naturally occurs from the breakdown of uranium in the soil, rock, and water. It is the number one cause of lung cancer in non-smokers

Action Items:

- **Ventilation.** Pollutants can accumulate to levels that pose health problems.
 - Let in fresh air.
 - Bring in some house plants. They work as living air purifiers.
- **Eliminate Smoking in the Home.**

Indoor Air Quality Continued

- Clean. Do not allow dust or dander to accumulate.
- Inspection for fuel burning appliances. It is recommended that all fuel-burning appliances be inspected by a trained professional at the beginning of every heating season.
- Test for radon. Radon detectors are inexpensive. Most kits can be found at your local hardware store and have instructions for easy testing. If you have a basement, you should definitely consider a test.

References:

Image taken from (<http://4airrescue.com/services/indoor-air-quality/>)

EPA website (<http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/insidestory.html#Intro1>)

Oregon Health Authority website (<http://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/RadiationProtection/RadonGas/Pages/index.aspx>)

WebMD (<http://www.webmd.com/lung/features/12-ways-to-improve-indoor-air-quality>)

EPA website: (http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pdfs/co_factsheet_en.pdf)

Jessica Robb, Research

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