

GEMS Newsletter



YOUR GEMS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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- Heather Parman
- Sue Gardener
- Maggie Turner
- Ron Higgins
- Tamara Olcott
- Eric Gladwin
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- Carter Carlson
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A Message From the GEMS Coordinator

Spring is here! A time for new beginnings and renewal. As you can see we have found our new logo and it is my hope that it will help to remind us of our commitment to take care of our environment, one person and one step at a time. You'll find within these pages lots of helpful hints and ideas that we hope will encourage you to take that first step. I'd like to personally thank all of the wonderful people who helped make this year's Earth Week activities a success. You will find a summary of this year's events, and photos

on the next few pages. Thank you for all that you do to make our facility "green." Up and coming items are a household hazardous waste drop off up day, farmers market information, pharmaceutical waste management, and some more plastic recycling! The GEMS Committee stays very busy throughout the year with environmental compliance issues. Lastly, please remember to take your GEMS training module, as the medical center must be 100% completion by October, 1, 2010. See information below.

DON'T FORGET! TAKE YOUR GEMS TRAINING!

We are only at 45% completion rate for this mandatory training. GEMS training is a requirement by VHA directive OO57, and our GEMS MCM 138-11, as well as for completion of your personnel requirements. The training is available on the MARS webpage at:

http://vaww.portland.med.va.gov/Departments/CCE/Education_Division/Misc_h.htm/MARS/index.htm

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Earth Week Summary FY 2010

Earth day, continues to be a big deal at the Portland VA Medical Center, especially this year, celebrating the 40th Anniversary! Portland celebrated all week long with events. The week began with a garden party work day at our Vietnam Memorial Garden in Vancouver (see page 3). The garden brings employees and the community together to provide a green space for Veterans. Monday, was poster day, an informational opportunity for employees to learn



more about what the facility is doing, through items like recycling, biking to work, the GEMS committee, and combined federal campaign. The “Dirt” movie was also shown which allows individuals to understand the soil and why it is so important to preserve this precious resource.

The week continued with displays and information concerning worm composting, master recycling, the energy trust and the importance of eliminating and recycling plastics. Portland also likes to get employees involved by having collection opportunities for personal products like Nike shoes; which takes tennis shoes and uses them to make sport courts, cell phones for soldiers which are recycled and the funds are used for calling cards so soldiers can talk to their families, collection of electronics that are rebuilt and donated to Veterans and non-profits, and paper shredding. Please see collection results in Table 1 below. One of the larger events of the week was the office swap, which allows employees to bring unwanted items for someone else to take and re-use in their office. This is always a popular event for staff as they want to get rid of old items, trade for something new, or find something they need. Throughout the week, the GEMS committee was present promoting the environment by having a spinning wheel for give away items that included plants, re-usable, non-plastic produce bags, water bottles etc. and having contests for the best environmental tip and a new GEMS logo.

Finally, on Saturday, the GEMS Committee teams up with a local group to remove ivy from the Portland campus. This prolongs the life of the trees and gives us a chance to once again, work with the community. Each year, earth week is dedicated to promoting environmental awareness, sustainability and just plain having a good time. Portland continues to be a leader in environmental sustainability and the Portland VA Medical Center enjoys being a part of that.



Table 1: Collection Results

Collection	Amount
Electronics	3300 lbs
Cell phones	57 items
Shoes	58 items
Paper Shredding	600 lbs
Office Swap	300 lbs

Earth Week Celebration Photos 2010



Spring Memorial Garden Party Celebrating Earth Day 2010

Community Resource Development:

Our first garden party of the year was on April 18th celebrating Earth Day 2010, and it was a success! We at the VA Community Development Center would like to give a big thank you to the people who came out to volunteer for the day, including veterans, friends of the Garden, students from Clark College, employees from the Clark County building, Starbucks, VA Medical Center, as well as students from Our Lady Lourdes school. With Generous donations of coffee and donuts from Starbucks and Krispy Kreme, made the event truly a party.

Shirley Marie Murphy



Did you know?

WATER FACTS

- ◆ 70% of global freshwater use is devoted to irrigation.
- ◆ 528 gallons of water are required to produce a day's worth of food for one person.
- ◆ 1,680 gallons go into creating one pound of grain-fed beef.
- ◆ 4.4 billion pounds of human waste enter the world's waterways each day. In developing countries 70% of industrial waste is dumped into the water supply with no treatment.
- ◆ The total amount of freshwater on earth that can be used by humans and ecosystems is 5.6×10^{16} gallons. This is 0.01 of all the freshwater on earth. 97% of the available freshwater is underground, but groundwater is being depleted as we consume freshwater more quickly than it is being replenished.
- ◆ Water use has grown twice as fast as population over the past century.
- ◆ The daily requirement for sanitation, bathing, and cooking needs, as well as for assuring survival, is about 13.2 gallons per person.



~ Discover Magazine, December 2009

Plastic bags and packaging



Americans use over 100 billion plastic bags every year. Only 1-3% of these get recycled. The 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags that end up as trash every year around the globe, devastate fragile ecosystems and take around a thousand years to decompose! They wash up on beaches, and more than a million birds and 100,000 marine mammals and sea turtles die every year from eating or getting entangled in plastic. The raw material of plastic bags is oil. The more we use plastic bags, the more we waste oil—a non-renewable energy source. Reducing plastic bags will decrease foreign oil dependency.



Plastic container packaging is also not being recycled as much as it should be. Plastic is not biodegradable, and does NOT break down in landfills. It is photodegradable, which means under exposure to the sun, it will become brittle and break into increasingly smaller pieces. Much of the plastic bottles and containers that do not get recycled, end up in the ocean. There are 6 locations on the globe where ocean currents trap floating debris. The North Pacific Gyre is one, between Hawaii and California, and is twice the size of Texas. The debris found there includes plastic bags, nets, ropes, bottles, motor oil jugs, plastic toys, tarps, tires, and plastic cones. Twenty percent of the plastic debris comes from ships, but 80% is man-made and comes from land. As the plastic breaks down into smaller pieces, it is mistaken for plankton and jellyfish and consumed by marine mammals. Bisphenol A, a common chemical used to make certain plastics has been linked to diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Bisphenol A is entering the human food chain through our marine mammals, who are ingesting our plastic garbage.



You can reverse these processes by using cloth bags to take home groceries and other purchases, by recycling ALL plastic at home & at work, and by looking for ways to decrease and eliminate plastic packaging in your purchases.

Getting to know your GEMS Committee Members!

Denise La Lande, Nurse Consultant for Quality & Performance Service

Denise joined PVAMC in August 1991 as a nurse on 5D. She became a unit shift leader & worked there 8 years before taking a nursing supervisor position for one year at Portland Providence Medical Center. She returned to PVAMC in September 2000 in her current



capacity in Quality & Performance Service. She has been a member of the GEMS Committee 3½ years. Denise recycles at home and at work, and is continually looking for additional ways to go green. She uses compact fluorescent light bulbs, keeps the thermostat turned down, composts, and takes public transportation. Her passion is removing plastics in the environment—from using reusable mesh bags for grocery produce & cloth bags for transporting groceries and other purchases, to avoiding purchases in plastic containers. Only 1-3% of plastic bags get recycled and huge numbers of plastic containers end up in the oceans, killing more than a million sea birds and 100,000 marine mammals every year. Her official duties for GEMS include assisting the committee with external inspection readiness and performance improvement.

Denise is a widow with 2 adult sons in college, both pursuing careers in health care. Denise is looking forward to selling her current house and adding solar panels to her next home. Her next car will be a hybrid.

If you are interested in becoming a GEMS Committee Member please contact Wendy Trapp at ext.55417 or email: wendy.trapp@va.gov

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CFL LIGHTING...

Heather Parman, Program Support Assistant, R&D Service

One thing I learned during my time in the lighting industry, was that most people are hesitant about changing/using CF bulbs because they feel that the light itself is too blue or cool. What an individual needs to be aware of is the Kelvin or “K” number listed for the bulb. The higher the number the cooler or bluer the light. The standard incandescent bulb is around 2700K. If the Kelvin for a bulb is 6000K, then it would be as if the individual were standing outside. There are a number of bulbs on the market these days, that are closer to the incandescent light or 2700K. For more on this topic, please visit:



http://www.eartheasy.com/live_energyeff_lighting.htm#2c

<http://energytrust.org/residential/energy-star-products/choosing-a-product/cfl-bulbs.aspx>

DIY Energy Audit:

http://energytrust.org/library/forms/be_fm_commercialselfaudit.pdf

Household Green Cleaners

Many of the products we use in our homes contain chemicals that are hazardous to environment as well as people. Take a look at the labels on the cleaning products in your home. Poison or Danger warnings indicate highly toxic, flammable or corrosive products that can kill an adult with just a few drops. Warning or Caution warnings signal a moderate hazard or toxicity where a teaspoon or ounce can be fatal.



Choosing less or non-toxic products to clean your home will help to protect your family and the environment. You may also save money by using simple, safe ingredients you already have to make your own cleaners.

All-purpose cleaners

Try the following all-purpose cleaners by mixing ingredients in a spray bottle. Use for cleaning countertops, floors, walls, carpet and upholstery.

1. Combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white distilled vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon liquid soap and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water, shake to blend,
or
2. Dissolve 4 tablespoons baking soda in one quart of warm water, or
Use a mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vinegar and 1 cup to 1 quart of warm water.

For an abrasive cleaner, try using baking soda.

Grease cleaner

Mix vinegar and salt together for a good surface cleaner. It will remove grease if the vinegar is at full strength.

Disinfectants

For kitchen cutting boards and bathroom fixtures, use a white distilled vinegar spray followed by a 3 percent peroxide spray and wipe clean.

Glass cleaner

Combine 1 quart warm water with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar or 2 tablespoons lemon juice (use both if you want cleaning with a lemon scent).

The Hazardless Home Handbook is an excellent resource for alternatives to over 50 common household products. It can be found at www.oregonmetro.gov, select Sustainable Living, and then select Green Cleaners; it is featured as the Metro Pick on the right side of the screen.

Try to use up your old toxic cleaning products. If that is not possible, dispose of them properly through Metro's household hazardous waste program. For more information on Metro Recycling, call 503 234-3000 for locations or to find a community collection event.

GEMS Environmental Tips

Submitted by employees during Earth Week 2010

- ◆ Peggy Morris won a bag of environmental items for her tip of: Bring a metal fork to eat your lunch with rather than a plastic fork and also bring a cloth napkin. Below are the rest of the tips that were received.
- ◆ Use green, renewable energy whenever possible.
- ◆ Make next year official green-year with 4 celebrations representing the 4 seasons
- ◆ Canteen use wheat based biodegradable containers and utensils
- ◆ Reuse dryer sheets for spot cleaning floors – just like swiffer mops
- ◆ Provide more information on Earth Day for protecting the environment
- ◆ Get rid of coal fired power plants
- ◆ Change all fluorescent lamps from 32 watt to 25 watt lamps, save 24% with no difference in quality
- ◆ Use beer as a slug bait/trap which avoids using hazardous chemicals
- ◆ Use grocery bag to bring lunch and then use it for garbage
- ◆ Composting and compostable to-go boxes for the VA canteen, like OHSU program
- ◆ Do away with Styrofoam in the Canteen and have more recycle bins for plastic bottles
- ◆ Gather cans and bottles while taking a walk
- ◆ Don't use plastic grocery bags
- ◆ Use a 2 liter bottle to make a funnel for all sorts of things – put flour in a canister, put bird seed in bird feeder, fill salt shaker, etc. Just cut off the bottom of the bottle.
- ◆ Go paperless!
- ◆ Goats recycle Christmas trees
- ◆ Staff that picks up recycled paper place it all in the same bins for shredding. If they separate the shredding from the recycling, more paper could be recycled.
- ◆ Fix the rotating doorway entrance to Building 101. Replace with entrance like Bldg. 100 or the doors at PDX airport.
- ◆ Trap slugs with beer or if no beer, boil a pot of water with honey (1/2 cup per gallon). When cool add some yeast (1 packet), mix well. Dig a hole in garden the size of a plastic cup. Fill cup half full with beer or honey water and place cup into the soil so the rim is flush with soil. Slugs migrate to the cup and can't get out.
- ◆ Use eco-font or Century Gothic (30% less ink used over old Arial) in printing. The best solution is to stop printing e-mail and net content.

