



**P O R T L A N D
VA MEDICAL CENTER**

**YOUR GEMS
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- Heather Parman
- Will Beckman

Safety Program Support

- Sue Gardner

Technology & Information Management

- Tamara Olcott

SUMMER 2011

GEMS Newsletter



A Message From the GEMS Coordinator

Happy Summer everyone! At least I think it is summer. We have had a busy spring celebrating earth day events, such as the sustainability fair, electronics recycling, collecting Nike shoes and cell phones for soldiers and even an office swap.

We also visited every department, including the Community Based Outpatient Clinics and collected environmental aspects and impacts that each area might be doing. It is a VHA and ISO 14000.1 required collection and helps the GEMS committee focus on the environmental issues that need the most work and set our objectives and targets for the next year.

We had a third party environmental compliance audit in early June, which identified 12 findings at our Vancouver campus and 13 at our Portland campus.

These items will be tracked to completion monthly in the GEMS Committee.

Finally, our facility was recognized by Practice Green Health, as an Environmental Partner for Change, with Distinction. We have to compete with all hospitals across the nation and we were the only VA to receive this honored award. Great job everyone and keep up the good work. Future happenings will be our office swap on Sept. 21, and possibly a DEA collection event. Stay tuned, and get outside and enjoy the weather while you still can!

Wendy Trapp
GEMS Coordinator

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



PHARMACY WASTE AT PORTLAND VA MEDICAL CENTER

What do we do?

Pharmacy waste is an increasing water pollution problem in the US. There are many articles stating how antibiotics, hormones, and pain relievers are being found in excess quantities in our waterways. And it is questionable how much more of these items the wastewater treatment plants will be able to handle. In an effort to do our part in providing clean water to enjoy for recreation, drinking etc. I am pleased to announce that currently, the Portland VA Medical Center is collecting all pharmaceutical waste to keep it out of the landfills and waterways. Since we started this program last year, we have collected over 1933 lbs of hazardous and 7364lbs non-hazardous pharmacy waste.

The Environmental Protection Agency is focusing more and more on pharmacy waste across the nation and targeting hospitals that do not have a waste management program in place. If you have questions about pharmacy waste in your area, please contact Wendy Trapp, GEMS Coordinator at extension 55417 or visit one of these websites for more information.

[Oregon Environmental Council-pharmacy waste](#)

[MSNBC-Pharmaceuticals in the Water](#)

[EPA's Draft Guidance on pharmaceutical waste](#)

[Practice Greenhealth Guide to Pharmacy Waste](#)

Cost:

\$1.90/lb for non hazardous drugs

\$5.83/lb for hazardous drugs

It is a costly program, so please do not put empty vials, tubing, IV bags or other items into the bins.



HELP! Sharps and Medications!

How do I dispose of these at home?



Unlike industry, household pharmaceutical waste is exempt from regulations. However, managing it appropriately is still the best method to keep others from misusing the drugs, and for the environment.



Portland VA Medical Center is participating in a TakeAway Envelope pilot program, designed to help Veterans discard unwanted medications from the convenience of their home. This program provides an anonymous, prepaid, packaged envelope that is handed out by the pharmacies, at Community Out based Care Clinics. You can put any medications in the envelopes, except narcotics and needles. These medications are then sent straight to incineration. This keeps the medications from getting into the wrong hands, as well as keeping them out of the landfills and water ways. Please see your pharmacist for more details.

Currently, this program is not available for sharps, but there are many methods for sharps disposal within the community. Some ideas are: local garbage hauler, local pharmacies, and Metro. Currently, PVAMC does not take patients sharps back, as we do not have staff to manage the containers and the disposal is very costly. For more information on household pharmaceutical waste collection events and disposal see one of the resources below.

Factsheet: [Oregon DEQ household pharmacy waste disposal](#)

Metro: [Metro Sharps disposal program](#)

[Portland Police drop off boxes](#)

Drug drop off box also located at Beaverton City Hall; adjacent to the customer service counter of the Beaverton Police Department's Records Division.

The Green Thing (Anonymous Email String)

In the line at the store, the cashier told an older woman that she should bring her own grocery bags because plastic bags weren't good for the environment.

The woman apologized to her and explained, "We didn't have the green thing back in my day."

The clerk responded, "That's our problem today. Your generation did not care enough to save our environment."

She was right -- our generation didn't have the green thing in its day.

Back then, we returned milk bottles, soda bottles and beer bottles to the store. The store sent them back to the plant to be washed and sterilized and refilled, so it could use the same bottles over and over. So they really were recycled.

But we didn't have the green thing back in our day.

We walked up stairs, because we didn't have an escalator in every store and office building. We walked to the grocery store and didn't climb into a 300-horsepower machine every time we had to go two blocks.

But she was right. We didn't have the green thing in our day.

Back then, we washed the baby's diapers because we didn't have the throw-away kind. We dried clothes on a line, not in an energy gobbling machine burning up 220 volts -- wind and solar power really did dry the clothes. Kids got hand-me-down clothes from their brothers or sisters, not always brand-new clothing. But that old lady is right; we didn't have the green thing back in our day.

Back then, we had one TV, or radio, in the house -- not a TV in every room. And the TV had a small screen the size of a handkerchief (remember them?), not a screen the size of the state of Montana.

In the kitchen, we blended and stirred by hand because we didn't have electric machines to do everything for us.

When we packaged a fragile item to send in the mail, we used a wadded up old newspaper to cushion it, not Styrofoam or plastic bubble wrap.

Back then, we didn't fire up an engine and burn gasoline just to cut the lawn. We used a push mower that ran on human power. We exercised by working so we didn't need to go to a health club to run on treadmills that operate on electricity.

But she's right; we didn't have the green thing back then.

We drank from a fountain when we were thirsty instead of using a cup or a plastic bottle every time we had a drink of water.

We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blades in a razor instead of throwing away the whole razor just because the blade got dull.

But we didn't have the green thing back then.

Back then, people took the streetcar or a bus and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their moms into a 24-hour taxi service.

We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances. And we didn't need a computerized gadget to receive a signal beamed from satellites 2,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest pizza joint.

But isn't it sad? The current generation laments how wasteful we old folks were just because we didn't have the green thing back then?





Coming Soon!-Office Swap

Have items you can no longer use and want to get rid of? Need new office supplies?

Come and exchange old for new or just come and take what you want. First come, first serve! Everything must go! Located on the VA skywalk, Sept. 21, from 11am to 1pm. See you there!

Getting to know your GEMS Committee Members!

Will Beckman, Bio Lab Technician



Hello! I'm Will Beckman, and I work as a Bio Lab Technician in the Research Service Department at the Portland VA Medical Center (PVAMC). I have been with the PVAMC since February 2006, and I became a member of the GEMS committee in December 2010. My interest in the mission and activities of the GEMS Committee developed while attending the PATHWAYS Program this past summer. During PATHWAYS, I became interested in the possibility of composting food waste at our hospital; the GEMS committee, along with other PVAMC employees, had already begun the process of implementing a composting program. After learning more about the GEMS Committee, I discovered what a positive impact that this committee has at PVAMC as well as with our community at large. I look forward to working with the GEMS committee members to reduce waste, to implement positive and cost effective changes in waste management, and to help us all become more mindful of environmental issues both locally as well as regionally.

Energy! Beat the Heat with Energy Saving Tips for the Home

With the summer months quickly approaching and utility prices on the rise, there are several measures, both simple and complex, that homeowners can take to conserve energy and save on utility bills. For more tips like these, and to view the interactive Energy Star home tool, visit www.energystar.gov/home

Air leaks are a big source of energy loss. A common place where they occur is under the door leading from the garage to the house. Install a door sweep to keep cool air in and warm air out.

Ceiling Fans: On hot summer days, dialing up the thermostat by only two degrees and using your ceiling fan can lower air conditioning costs by up to 14% over the course of the cooling season.

HVAC System: Dirt and neglect are the top causes of cooling system inefficiency and failure. Be sure to change your systems air filter regularly and have routine maintenance performed by a qualified technician.

Washing Machine: Wash your laundry with cold water, whenever possible. Hot water heating accounts for 90% of the energy that your washer uses.

Attic: Look for holes, tears, and other signs of leaking ductwork, then seal them with mastic or metal tape. Insulate all the ducts you can access. Weather strip and insulate your homes attic hatch or door to keep hot air from leaking into air-conditioned spaces.

Cooking: Use the right size pot on stove burners. A 6" pot on an 8" burner wastes over 40% of the burner's heat. Also, use your microwave or toaster to cook or reheat small portions; it can reduce your cooking energy by as much as 80%.

Thermostat: Install a programmable thermostat to automatically adjust your homes temperature settings when you're away or sleeping. When used properly, this can save an average of \$180 per year.



Water Conservation

Excellent article on “water-related energy use in the U.S.”

"[The Carbon Footprint of Water](#)," by Bevan Griffiths-Sattenspiel and Wendy Wilson, is a 50-page, May 2009, report funded by the Energy Foundation. The carbon footprint of water is a function of the amount of energy it takes to bring water from one place to another. The report draws the connection between energy consumption and water use in four sections: The Energy Intensity of Water, Estimating Energy in Water End-Uses, A New Estimate of National Water-Related Energy Use, and Saving Energy by Saving Water. The report begins with an informative Executive Summary.

Want some more green? Visit the GEMS website!

<http://vaww.portland.med.va.gov/Departments/CNE/fmsd/GEMS/Index.htm>