Environmental Responsibility

A Food Service Industry Perspective

Unidine®

Putting our expertise on the table®

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Greening the business and healthcare community: taking a lead role in creating a new culture of environmental sustainability

More and more we are inundated with data about the devastating consequences we will face if immediate steps are not taken to protect and conserve our natural resources. It is nearly impossible to pick-up a newspaper, turn on the television, or go online without hearing about the environmental crisis we face and the irrevocable damage that will occur if we do not act.

The construction, use, and demolition of our buildings, as well as the manufacturing of building materials, add to the environmental issues we face. Here in America, buildings account for a third of our total energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and waste output according to the United States Green Building Council. Becoming more environmentally responsible in the way we build and maintain the places where we live and work – including our hospitals and long-term care communities - is critical if we hope to establish a new culture of sustainability.

To create a world in which sustainability becomes just an accepted part of business, administrators must join executives from other industries in setting a standard for environmental leadership. Designing, constructing, and operating sustainable buildings, and contracting with suppliers and distributors who support healthy food are all ways to enact change and become environmental leaders.

Procuring Green Products

The weekly – or even daily – maintenance of a business, healthcare or long-term care building or facility requires the use of hundreds of products from floor cleaners and hand soap to paint, fertilizer, and paper goods by every department. Procuring greener products not only protects the earth but promotes the health and well-being of patients, residents, employees, and visitors. What's more, eliminating caustic, acidic and abrasive cleaners and replacing them with safer formulations is not only healthier, but also extends the useful life of carpets, floor coverings, wall treatments, etc.

But realistically, in order to purchase safer, greener products, they must be cost effective and easily obtainable. Though the production and widespread availability of all things green haven't yet hit mainstream America, reasonable progress has been made. For instance, SYSCO, North America's largest food service distributor, has replaced nonylphenol ethoxylate, an NPE that has been known to harm aquatic life, with safer formulations in its cleaning products. Since 2004, the company has replaced nearly 350,000 pounds of this chemical with a safer alternative. SYSCO is one of several major corporations committed to the total replacement of harmful chemicals in its products by the end of 2007.

In response to the growing awareness of the green building movement, Sherwin-Williams has introduced the GreenSure(TM) designation for its environmentally preferred paint products. GreenSure products offer the highest indoor air quality ratings with low VOCs and low odor. For the second consecutive year, Kimberly-Clark Corporation has been selected as the sustainability leader in the Personal Products category of the 2007 Dow Jones Sustainability World Indexes. The Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes (DJSI) track the performance of the leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide. At these and many other companies, an increasing number of greener products are in on the shelf or in development.

Supporting Sustainable Agriculture

Supporting sustainable agriculture is another way to minimize our effect on the environment. Costa Fruit & Produce, a leader in the produce industry supports local farmers, uses sustainable organic farming methods, and has incorporated many environmentally friendly policies into their everyday business practices for many years. For example, in an effort to help growers run their farms more efficiently, Costa instituted a seven day net payment program for all produce and agricultural products grown or produced in New England by independent farmers and producers.

Establishing mutually beneficial partnerships with local growers is another way to promote sustainable agriculture. Here at Unidine, we have initiated an important relationship with a community-supported agriculture program at a western Massachusetts farm. With this partnership, we coordinate the receipt and distribution of organic produce from the farm to a select group of its Boston-area clients during the May to November growing season. This fresh, locally-grown organic produce is incorporated into their daily menus and salad bars. The program serves as a model for embarking on other similar partnerships throughout the company.

One more way is by establishing Farmer's Markets. Griffin Hospital in Derby Connecticut, a Unidine client, has recently become the first hospital in the state to introduce a farmer's market right on campus. This has enabled employees and others to conveniently buy fresh, locally grown organic produce for use at home. To further promote this effort, Unidine will prepare recipes each week using this fresh produce and offer samples, recipes, and nutritional information. In addition to promoting sustainable agriculture, this initiative is designed to promote healthy eating.

One caveat to purchasing organic produce is to be sure to calculate the impact of "Food Miles" – the distance food travels from farm to consumer. Food miles are something consumers probably don't consider – but should. According to ATTRA, the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, produce in the U.S. travels, on average, 1300 - 2000 miles from farm to consumer. The number of miles traveled, fossil fuels used, and carbon dioxide emitted are critical parts of the sustainability equation and can potentially cancel out any benefits derived from purchasing organic produce.

Contracting with Environmentally Responsible Suppliers and Distributors

Contracting with suppliers and distributors who share your philosophies about the environment will advance your efforts to create a more sustainable community. From food service to housekeeping to landscaping, hiring the right supplier can make a world of difference in all aspects of facilities management. What's more, a savvy supplier can be an invaluable resource in helping to maximize conservation efforts and procure better products such as hormone-free dairy products that may not be any more expensive.

This is particularly true when it comes to the food service operation. Regardless of whether your program is self operated or you've outsourced this function, establishing an eco-friendly dining program is particularly important to maintaining the overall economic and environmental health of your facility. Special attention should be paid to 'greening' this function because so much of the waste we generate comes from food and its packaging. During the past few years, the restaurant industry has stepped up its efforts to promote energy conservation and waste reduction. Now, these efforts have spilled over into every aspect of the food service industry. As a result, there is so much more information has become available about conserving energy, integrating cost-effective eco-friendly practices, and making the most environmentally responsible choices possible.

One common tactic in the kitchen has been to replace existing appliances with more energy efficient equipment. At one long-term care community located outside Boston, Massachusetts, the recent installation of energy efficient dishwashers has resulted in a savings of 840 gallons of water daily or 306,600 gallons per year. In addition, the facility has realized a 30-40% reduction in dishwashing detergent and uses newer more efficient ovens that use much less energy. Unlike traditional models that often run all day long, these models go into standby mode when not in use. The facility has made other capital investments as well. Recently, the decision was made to purchase additional china to eliminate the use of disposable dinnerware. As well, additional food storage container lids have also been purchased, resulting in a 60% reduction in the use of aluminum foil. While these purchases require upfront spending, they are cost-effective choices with long-term benefits.

At another long term care community in Ipswich Massachusetts, the decision to transform the dining services program into a completely green operation has been a "mission" for administrators. In fact, they spend *more* to run an environmentally conscious operation. In an attempt to recycle 100% of reusable materials, they recently purchased six 75 gallon recycling drums. Due to the increased volume of glass and plastic now collected, they have added a second weekly recycling pick-up. What's more, twice a week administrators pay a local farmer to haul away the facility's food waste, which he feeds to his pigs. This environmentally friendly practice has also contributed to the significant reduction of waste.

Regardless of budgetary restrictions, businesses, hospitals and long-term care providers and their suppliers and distributors can do more than they think to preserve natural resources. Here are six areas on which to focus:

- **Maximizing Energy Efficiency** – purchasing energy efficient appliances, kitchen equipment, and light bulbs; conserving heat and electricity
- **Conserving Water** – conserving water; Using low-flush toilets and energy efficient washing machines and dishwashers
- **Recycling & Composting** – recycling solid waste products such as glass, plastic, metal, paper, grease, etc.; composting food waste; using recycled, tree-free, and biodegradable or organic products
- **Promoting Sustainable Agriculture** – procuring organic and/or locally-grown foods and supporting local agriculture
- **Choosing Chemical-Free Products –** purchasing chlorine-free paper products, non-toxic cleaning supplies, and chemicals
- **Educating Employees** – educating your staff about environmental sustainability

There are many resources available:

With so much data available, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Fortunately there are many agencies that can help administrators find a starting point. The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), Environmental Protection agency (USEPA), and Healthcare without Harm are three organizations that can offer guidance.

For those building new facilities, the U.S. Green Building Council can be a valuable resource. The USGBC's core purpose is to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated. Becoming involved in its local chapter can help you connect with green building experts in your area, and share strategies, resources, and best practices. It is the USGBC that developed the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System™, a

nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance sustainable green buildings.

Another resource is the US Environmental Protection Agency. The USEPA has established a clear set of priorities regarding environmental stewardship known as “The Three Rs”: reduce, reuse, and recycle. To advance these priorities, the USEPA has established its WasteWise Program. Through this program, organizations of all types can design a more efficient waste reduction program, set goals, and track their progress to become more environmentally responsible.

Healthcare without Harm is a third go-to organization. Its Healthy Food in Healthcare Pledge, a voluntary program of Health Care Without Harm, outlines steps hospitals can take to support healthy food that is not only nutritious, but is also grown in ways that are economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human dignity and justice.

Financial Implications of Going Green

Many of us make the assumption that choosing green products costs more. Oftentimes they’re right. For this reason, support for eco-friendly initiatives varies. While some are in a position (and are willing) to spend more to implement green practices and purchase products like antibiotic-free beef, others cannot afford to take such measures. While it is true there may be up-front costs associated with going green, in the long run, there is much to be gained.

Others may be surprised to learn that becoming more environmentally responsible is only one of the benefits to embracing the green approach. In fact, a strong connection has been established between LEED-certified green buildings and increased productivity and satisfaction among employees who work in them. On the flip side, poorly designed and maintained buildings create long-term environmental *and* economic damage. Integrating up-to-the-minute design elements ultimately reduces operating costs and enhances real estate values.

But change does not need to occur on such a large scale. Even making a small change such as switching to a gentler more eco-friendly floor cleaner can make a difference - environmental responsibility has to start somewhere.

Now is the time to take action

By making thoughtful green choices and integrating sustainability practices into your operations, you can accomplish many objectives. In addition to conserving valuable natural resources, you'll serve fresher and often healthier foods, make a positive impact on the regional economy by supporting local agriculture, and increase your bottom line through energy and water conservation.

Though it is now voluntary, implementing sustainability initiatives will most likely become mandatory in the near future. As long-term care providers, it is critical to become educated on how to improve the environment by reducing waste and increasing the energy efficiency of facilities everywhere.