

UW Health: Joins national Better Climate Challenge, kickstarts new sustainability initiatives

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MADISON, Wis. – To commemorate the 52nd annual Earth Day, UW Health is announcing its participation in the nationwide [Better Climate Challenge](#) and sharing its latest innovations in sustainability.

Recently, UW Health became one of the first health systems in the country to join the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Climate Challenge; committing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% within 10 years. UW Health is one of more than 90 organizations across the U.S. joining this challenge.

UW Health is taking on this work because it is committed to improving the health of the communities we serve, according to Mary Evers Statz, program director of Energy Management and Sustainability, UW Health. To do that, we must contribute to the health of the environment in our communities.

“Our first step is to become as energy efficient as possible,” she said. “As a hospital, we are 24/7/365 but that makes us uniquely positioned to find ways to be fast and efficient without compromising patient care.”

The work will include determining when and where lighting and mechanicals can be turned down, dimmed or turned off while not in use. Experts will evaluate hospitals' and clinics' walls, roofs and windows to ensure they are well insulated and efficient.

The health system is also working to implement renewable energy. In the Eastpark Medical Center that will be built on the east side of Madison, energy efficiency was woven into the design.

“It’s really a systematic approach,” said Statz. “It’s a high bar, but I believe we can get there with the help of the Better Climate Challenge and our community partners.”

The Better Climate Challenge builds on years of experience through the [Better Buildings Initiative](#). Through Better Buildings, organizations committed to being more efficient, thereby saving billions of dollars on energy bills and reducing emissions. UW Health signed on to the Better Buildings Challenge in 2016 and committed to reducing energy use intensity by 20% by 2023, using a baseline measurement from 2013. The health system surpassed that goal, achieving a 24% energy use intensity reduction in 2017.

Apart from ambitious energy efficiency goals, UW Health has also kicked off some significant waste reductions strategies through the health system’s pharmacies.

Since 2012, UW Health would use more than 31,000 Styrofoam containers and 62,000 non-recyclable gel-based ice packs per year to transport patient medications. This created an enormous opportunity for waste reduction, according to James Langley, pharmacy manager, UW Health.

Recently, UW Health switched to using 100% recyclable transport containers that include ice packs made with recyclable plastic and contain nitrogen-based gel which can be safely disposed of.

“These switches will make a really impactful change in pharmaceutical waste at UW Health,” said Langley. “We’re so thrilled to take this step to become more sustainable.”

UW Health also changed the type of plastic used for medication containers to a plastic that is recyclable, because recent international policy changes eliminated the ability to recycle the traditional orange pill bottles patients are used to seeing. This change will help prevent 240,000 pill bottles from ending up in a landfill every year.

The World Health Organization estimates 250,000 additional deaths per year could be contributed to climate change between 2030 and 2050. WHO also estimates the direct costs from climate change to healthcare will be between \$2 and 4 billion per year by 2030. UW Health is committed to addressing climate change for the health of our communities.

A pre-recorded interview with Statz is available.