

St. Mary's General Hospital Kitchener, Ontario

St. Mary's General Hospital is an acute care facility with 900 employees and 168 beds. St. Mary's is only the second hospital in North America to formally develop and register their Environmental Management System to the ISO 14001 Standard in September, 2001. St. Mary's is also one of the first hospitals in Ontario to eliminate chemical use on hospital grounds. This was done despite many obstacles including varying weather conditions, construction, and evolving insect predators.

Summary of Landscaping Practices:

Reducing and eliminating chemical use in current landscaping practices was first set as an objective and target in 2000, under the hospital's Environmental Management System. In the past, St. Mary's has been managing pests (grubs, cinch bugs, etc) and weeds (crab grass, clover, etc.) through the application of pesticides and herbicides. As this method of lawn care does not promote the health of staff, patients, visitors, the community, and the environment, St. Mary's has chosen to adopt a "no chemical policy".

Since 2000, St. Mary's landscaping company has utilized natural pest and weed control methods such as aerating, re-seeded and fertilizing to achieve a thick, lush lawn. Vegetation that was prone to attacks from insect predators was promptly identified and removed. Due to the on-going development of the hospital resulting in changes in landscape, St. Mary's has retained the services of a recent graduate from the Landscape Architecture program at the University of Guelph, to design the landscape in line with the hospital's 5-year "Master Plan." Future landscape plans will incorporate the use of drought resistant, native plants, ground covers, and salt tolerant plants. If intervention is required, the hospital will look to microbiological methods of pest management (i.e. nematodes).

Waterloo Region has some of the highest readings of smog in Ontario. Therefore, St. Mary's has also been working with their landscaping company to ensure that lawn maintenance using gas-powered machinery is not performed on "Smog Days." This not only helps St. Mary's promote and encourage hospital staff to utilize "Spare the air actions" set out by the Ministry of the Environment in their homes, but helps St. Mary's decrease their impact on air quality.

Benefits

Environmental:

The hospital's "chemical free" grounds policy has:

- Reduced overall impact on local environment/landscape and ground water;
- Reduced air emissions effecting the health and safety of staff, visitors, and landscaping company staff during spray applications, and;
- Reduced air emissions from gas-powered grounds-keeping equipment intensifying smog conditions in the local community. The generation of approximately 900 grams of carbon monoxide and 36 grams of nitrogen oxides and total hydrocarbon were avoided by not cutting the grass on high smog days.

Economic:

- Reduced liability of hospital towards access issues of sensitive/allergic patients, and;

Reduced cost of chemical applications- offset by the increased cost of additional measures.

Social:

St. Mary's proactive promotion of environmental issues has significantly improved community and staff relations;

Improved environmental education amongst staff has improved morale and the success of initiatives at the hospital and at home, and;

St. Mary's General Hospital was recognized by the Region of Waterloo (Winner of the Region's 2001 Environmental Sustainability Awards – Business Category) and other community organizations.

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