



OSWER Innovations Pilot

Collaborative Partnership to Improve Environmental Performance in the Healthcare Sector

The Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) initiated a series of innovative pilots to test new ideas and strategies for environmental and public health protection to make OSWER programs more efficient, effective, and user-friendly. A small amount of money is set aside to fund creative proposals. The creative projects test approaches to waste minimization, energy recovery, recycling, land revitalization, and homeland security that may be replicated across various sectors, industries, communities, and regions. We hope these pilots will pave the way for programmatic and policy recommendations by demonstrating the environmental and economic benefits of creative, innovative approaches to the difficult environmental challenges we face today.

BACKGROUND

EPA and the American Hospitals Association (AHA) signed an agreement in 1998 setting goals for reducing the sector's large and diverse waste streams. With implementation assistance from Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E), the healthcare sector has made progress in achieving the waste reduction goals. Another big step in attaining waste reduction goals would be to incorporate them into the goals and standards of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO).

JCAHO is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the safety and quality of care through its accreditation process. JCAHO standards promote patient safety and care and good operational practices in all aspects of healthcare organizations. Nearly 17,000 healthcare organizations worldwide are accredited by JCAHO. Extensive on-site reviews are conducted at least once every three years. The reviews currently cover environmental issues in only a limited manner. An upcoming change in the review process provides a significant opportunity for H2E to facilitate improved understanding of JCAHO standards in waste stream management and performance improvement.

PILOT APPROACH

U.S. EPA Region 1, in partnership with H2E, AHA and its state associations, American Nurses Association (ANA), Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), and EPA's Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics and Office of Compliance Assistance, will establish an innovative collaborative partnership with multiple health care and regulatory organizations to work with JCAHO to improve environmental performance of the healthcare sector. The pilot will first focus on compliance as part of existing JCAHO standards and then will emphasize pollution prevention as part of JCAHO's performance improvement program.

This project will develop a curriculum to align environmental regulations and "beyond compliance" environmental performance with the JCAHO review process. Training will be provided for both JCAHO reviewers and healthcare organization personnel and results will be measured using data collected during the pilot and from H2E facility assessments.

INNOVATION

Hospitals for a Healthy Environment is innovative in that the tools and resources of a regulatory agency are

combined with those of trade associations and advocacy groups. H2E then works to improve environmental performance in the healthcare industry using advocacy and reward rather than the traditional command-and-control regulatory scheme. This pilot builds on the innovations of H2E by combining the best of voluntary programs with JCAHO's rigorous requirements for operation improvements to affect change more rapidly.

BENEFITS

The pilot will establish a relationship between EPA, H2E, and JCAHO that will result in continuous environmental improvement in the healthcare sector. Hospitals that are leaders in environmental compliance, pollution prevention, and community health improvement will receive recognition for their accomplishments. Patients, staff, families, visitors, and surrounding communities will all benefit from improved environmental performance by the healthcare sector. In addition, the JCAHO review process will maximize EPA compliance assistance and pollution prevention resources. The pilot has the potential to institutionalize waste minimization, mercury elimination, and pollution prevention practices in the health care sector.

CONTACTS

Cynthia Greene, EPA Region 1, 617-918-1813

For additional information, visit the EPA OSWER Innovations web site at: www.epa.gov/oswer/IWG.htm.