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Wednesday, Mar. 26, 2008

Health center leads a greener existence Organization's Green Team looks for ways to prevent waste

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UC Merced isn't the only green campus in town.

Golden Valley Health Centers, Merced campus, is putting the "reduce, recycle and reuse" motto to work on its own turf. It was recently awarded a Green Buildings Grant of \$25,000 to conserve resources through its infrastructure and staff habits.

This means more recycling, lighting motion detectors, a new subterranean irrigation system and the formation of the Green Team.

The team, a collaboration of about 20 Golden Valley employees, meets once a month to discuss what more the campus can do to reduce air pollution and unnecessary waste, said member Allyson Holman, a Golden Valley health educator.

It gives presentations encouraging employees to cut down on vehicle use, and got a bike rack installed to put this practice in motion.

Small changes -- such as the paper exchange -- can make a big difference, said member Penny Henry, a health center administrative assistant. Whenever staff members misprint or use extra paper when printing, they simply reuse that paper on the other side for in-office paperwork. When paper has been used on both sides, employees take it home to recycle.

Blue cans for bottle recycling are also placed around the campus. "There's potential for so much waste in any big business," Henry said. "It's good to have a team bring awareness to it."



Photo by George MacDonald
 Merced Sun-Star

Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition program associate Melissa Kelly-Ortega is part of a team that is working to implement green programs at Golden Valley Health Center.



March 26, 2008

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And Golden Valley has joined schools to address the Valley's pollution by installing the Merced/Mariposa Asthma Coalition's air quality flags. The flag is green when air quality is good, yellow when moderate, orange when unhealthy for sensitive groups and red when the air is unhealthy for everyone.

Adam Gintz, a Golden Valley shipping and receiving clerk, raises the flag each day. Air quality has been good during the past couple of weeks, he said.

Melissa Kelly-Ortega and Mary-Michal Rawling, both of the Asthma Coalition -- which is located on the Golden Valley campus -- are leading the health center's Green Building program.

One part of the program involves walking through each building to measure air flow and monitor for carbon dioxide. The Asthma Coalition has also done this for various local elementary schools.

But part of the project Kelly-Ortega and Rawling are particularly excited about is the new subterranean irrigation system.

The system is installed four inches underground, which can help it conserve water better than an above-ground irrigation system, said Eric Doss, landscape contract designer for the health center and CEO of Incentive New Creation. Because it's underground, less water evaporates in the sun.

And it helps generate healthy roots for the trees it waters, he added.

Roots are drawn to water, and if too much of that water sits above ground, the roots can break through the surface.

The new irrigation system will be installed in the campus quad in a couple of weeks. If it's a success, the system will extend to other parts of the campus, Kelly-Ortega said.

There are plenty of other ways the campus is already conserving resources. It has eliminated its bottled water to cut down on plastic waste, installing a filtration system instead. Employees bring in their own cups for drinking water.

And all the lights now have motion detectors. So if an employee leaves lights on before exiting a room, they automatically turn off after a certain period of time.

Gintz has extended recycling to his work in shipping and receiving. Cardboard boxes sent to the health center are broken down and reused.

Instead of the usual Styrofoam packing peanuts, his department has switched to biodegradable corn-starch packing materials.

All small steps. But, says the Green Team, the rewards of a large campus conserving its waste, energy and air quality will have big rewards in the future.

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