

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY HEALTHCARE



CLEANING UP HOSPITALS

An ecological footprint is defined as *the total amount of productive land and water that is required on a continuous basis to produce the resources that are consumed and to handle the wastes produced by a specific population.*

In 2001, Lions Gate Hospital in British Columbia was the first institution of its kind to have its ecological footprint calculated. The study was undertaken under the leadership of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. The results show that healthcare can have major environmental impacts.

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According to the journal *Alternatives*, the study at Lions Gate found that the total ecological footprint was 719 times larger than the actual land area occupied by the hospital. Of that, energy use represented 85 per cent of the total ecological footprint. The comparison was made that the footprint calculated for the City of Vancouver is about 180 times

larger than the land area occupied by the city. In short, hospitals are “environmental consumers” at a level about four times as great as the cities in which they are located.

A project undertaken at St. Mary’s General Hospital in Kitchener, Ontario demonstrated how sound environmental practices integrated in a hospital setting can make a significant difference. The program for environmental hospital management got underway when students in environmental studies from the University of Waterloo conducted a research program identifying the opportunities for an environmental management system. As a result, St. Mary’s environmental actions include comprehensive recycling and reuse programs that divert a total of 54 per cent of the hospital’s waste from landfill. This includes over 300 tons of glass, cans, plastic, cardboard, chemical recycling, food waste, batteries, computer cartridges, computers, and electric components per year.

In addition, the hospital’s new facilities will, on average, reduce energy consumption by 26 per cent compared to older buildings.

WATER CRISIS

China has experienced three water crises in the past three months. In November, an explosion in a chemical plant in the northeastern province of Jilin poisoned drinking water for millions and sent a poisonous slick heading towards Russia. In December, a spill of toxic cadmium forced authorities in areas downstream to turn off tap water supplies to tens of thousands of people in Guangdong. The third incident occurred in Dongguan City where three water plants were shut down last month because the salinity levels were five times the normally accepted level.