



Media Contact: Alexa Enriquez
713-591-0848

The World's Largest Medical Center's Institutions Collaborate to Celebrate Earth Day

HOUSTON (March 31, 2010) - On April 22nd, the Texas Medical Center, the world's largest medical complex, will join tens of thousands of organizations and groups around the world to celebrate Earth Day. This will be the second year for the TMC to celebrate Earth Day campus-wide due to the collaborative efforts of the TMC Sustainability Advisory Council, which consists of representatives from the 49 hospitals, universities and organizations in the TMC.

John Gamble, Dr. P.H. with The University of Texas School of Public Health and co-chair of the council notes that TMC institutions are stepping up to the plate. "Recycling at TMC institutions has quadrupled in the last two years, in large part because of the efforts of the sustainability advisory council and member institutions are actively looking at other ways to reduce their environmental footprints," said Gamble.

An example of these efforts includes that of the Texas Medical Center's newest member institution, The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston who encourages its staff and students to recycle. "By recycling 651 tons of paper and cardboard in 2009, UTMB saved 111,074 trees," said Ken Steblein, director of conservation initiatives.

Gamble reported that the council is tracking performance of the member institutions, not only of their recycling efforts, but energy consumption, water conservation and total waste generation as well. "These high value, big ticket items are driving green purchasing decisions and design for environment practices," said Gamble.

Aspects of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria have also been incorporated into design and construction practices at several member institutions. "Concurrently, the council is exploring options to collaboratively reclaim and reuse electronic products, food wastes, pallets and construction debris," added Gamble.

Winifred J. Hamilton, Ph.D, director of environmental health at Baylor College of Medicine and a founder of the group, emphasized the enthusiasm and sense of collaboration among the institutions.

"Not only is it a demonstration of the member institutions working together on this critical issue,

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but it will be an exceptional opportunity to raise awareness and educate the TMC community on how each of us can make a difference—at work and at home,” said Hamilton.

Earth Day at the Texas Medical Center will be held Thursday, April 22, at the John P. McGovern Texas Medical Center Commons, located at Bertner and Moursund, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Organizers expect approximately 50 exhibitors who will provide faculty, students, patients and visitors with useful information about how to live “green.” The event will feature an Earth Day wheel with prizes, as well as on-site recycling for a number of items, including eye glasses and cell phones. There will also be a number of demonstrations, including an electric vehicle and green cleaning techniques.

“The council is fulfilling a real need by sharing specific information about cost-effective sustainability initiatives and recycling in a medical center environment and by helping institutions get programs started,” said Hamilton. “For example, some of the larger institutions are now collecting recycling from institutions too small to support a recycling vendor.”

An example is the case of Texas Woman’s University, which needed help with identifying a recycling partner. After a meeting, BCM added TWU to its route and now picks up TWU’s recycled paper and cardboard weekly.

This win-win collaboration provides TWU an outlet for its recycled paper and cardboard, reducing its waste stream by approximately 25%. BCM adds these quantities to its recycled materials increasing the amounts it sells to its recycling partners. In addition, this solution reduces energy and emissions expended in recycling the materials, since additional trips are not needed.

Here are several Earth Day and everyday tips for reducing your ecological footprint that the TMC Sustainability Council recommends:

At the office:

- Turn off your computer monitor, printers, copy machines, and the lights when they are not being used.
- If possible, take the stairs instead of using the elevator.
- Print double-sided whenever possible. Minimize the amount of paper you use.
- Keep a recycling bin at your desk.
- Always think: how can I reduce, reuse or recycle.

At home:

- Choose energy-efficient products, such as those with the Energy Star label.
- Scrape rather than rinse dishes and wash only full dishwasher loads.

- Use energy-efficient florescent lights but be certain to recycle properly as they contain hazardous mercury.
- Donate clothing, furniture, old eye glasses and other items to people you know or appropriate charities.
- Reduce the number of miles you drive by walking, riding your bike, using public transportation, combining errands or moving closer to work or school.

For more information, visit <http://www.tmc sustainability.org/earthday/> or for media inquiries, call Alexa Enriquez at 713-791-6136 or by email to aenriquez@texasmedicalcenter.org.

ABOUT THE TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER: Founded in 1945, Texas Medical Center has grown to become the largest medical complex in the world. It is composed of 49 institutions, all of which are self-governing. Half are agencies of government: federal, state, county, city and local and the other half are private not-for-profit institutions, several of which are large health care systems. The goal of the Texas Medical Center institutions is to improve the health status of people everywhere through research, education and patient care.

Texas Medical Center, the corporation, encourages collaboration among institutions and provides many services to what has become the 12th largest business district in the United States with over 30 million square feet of built space. Former First Lady Barbara Bush has recognized the Texas Medical Center as "Houston's gift to the World". For more information, visit www.tmc.edu

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