

# Supporting a Healthy Planet

*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

[Laura Janet] Hi, I'm Laura Janet. On April 22, 2011, millions of people around the world will commemorate Earth Day. This year's theme is a Billion Acts of Green. People in every nation are encouraged to contribute to the promotion of environmental health. With me, today, is CDC's Chief Sustainability Officer, Liz York. Thank you for joining me, Liz.

[Liz York] Thanks, Laura. It's great to be here.

[Laura Janet] Liz, sustainability is a versatile term. How does CDC define it?

[Liz York] Well Laura, there are a number of definitions for sustainability, and here at CDC we link sustainability, of course, with personal and environmental health. It's not just reducing, reusing, and recycling resources, but it's doing these things in concert with promoting positive, healthy work environments and also positive environments for everyone in the world.

[Laura Janet] Why does CDC care about sustainability? Isn't it an environmental health issue, rather than a public health issue?

[Liz York] Well, sustainability is an integral part of CDC's mission. Environmental health has everything to do with personal, individual, and public health. We are a part of an eco system that we all must protect in order to sustain our own ability to thrive and live healthy lives.

[Laura Janet] What is CDC doing for Earth Day?

[Liz York] Well, we're really excited about Earth Day this year, and so, instead of just one day, we're commemorating an entire week. We have three main things that are going on this year.

The first is our Earth Walk 2011. We've been doing an Earth Walk for about three years now, and what an Earth Walk is, is a one-mile walk to promote health and environmental stewardship. We hold these at 17 different campuses, and it's the individual leaders at each of these 17 campuses that make Earth Walk a great event. They organize cookouts, walks, discussion groups, and other educational activities on Earth Walk Day. Last year we had over 500 walkers, and we're hoping to have even more this year.

The second thing we're doing this year for Earth Day this year is rolling out the Green and Healthy Challenge. This is an interactive, on-line tool to help influence behavior change for sustainable behaviors. CDC has developed this new tool, the Green and Healthy Challenge, and it will allow CDCers to assess their current behavior, report the results, and allow us to use the data to develop training, events, and promotions to help CDC be more sustainable. It allows users also to challenge themselves in the areas where they can see the greatest amount of improvement.

The third thing we're doing this year for Earth Day is we are continuing to collect recycling of electronics. Atlanta and non-Atlanta campuses are encouraged to bring their DVDs, their CDs, tapes, batteries, and key fobs to be recycled.

[Laura Janet] Many people are overwhelmed by green goals. What are some strategies you recommend?

[Liz York] Well, the one thing that I see, over and over, is people trying to change everything, and really we need to focus on the small steps. The little things we do matter. At home, people can reduce, reuse, and recycle; they can turn off their lights; cut down on our water use, especially when you're brushing your teeth, make sure you turn that water off. Also, I think that we can use reusable dishware, not plastics; buy sustainable food and local food because these help protect our environment. Also, at work, you can do the same things, such as turning out your lights, turning off your computer, and buying products for work that have more recycled content and that are less harmful to the environment.

[Laura Janet] Liz, how can organizations incorporate sustainability into their operational structures?

[Liz York] Well, one of the things that we've noticed is that top-down directives aren't always the most effective at getting people to change their behaviors. It's a concentrated effort to use grass roots support and management support from the top so that everyone is moving towards the same goals. We concentrate at CDC on various sectors or areas of focus. So, some of the sectors that we look at include facilities and green space and ways we can save water and energy, green meetings and green offices so that we are doing all we can in our every day work. By recycling our waste and buying products with more recycled content, as well as composting our food waste, we are closing the loop on our products.

Transportation and telework is another sector where we have a great deal of focus And don't forget worksite wellness, because if your people aren't happy and healthy and in an environment that promotes them being healthy, it's going to be hard to follow through with any of these sustainability efforts.

Another thing that's really important about incorporating sustainability into your operational structure is that you need to measure things, because if you're not measuring it, there's no way you're going to be able to manage the effect that your actions are having. One of the things that we spend a lot of time and effort on is collecting and tracking metrics on our sustainability efforts.

[Laura Janet] CDC has 17 campuses across the nation. I would imagine that buildings account for a large part of CDC's carbon footprint. What is CDC doing to minimize the impact?

[Liz York] CDC's Buildings and Facilities Department has implemented the Federal Guiding Principles for high performance and sustainable buildings. CDC's own sustainable design guidelines incorporate Federal requirements so that designers and operators of our facilities

follow policy and regulatory requirements, design and construction criteria, and operations and management criteria for our facilities.

In addition, we have four LEEDS Certified Buildings on three campuses. This includes the very first LEED GOLD Certified Federal Laboratory. We have intensive storm water management. Recently, our area went through a severe drought and CDC focused on storm water and water management practices. We have several green roofs in our inventory.

In terms of facilities, the low hanging fruit has a great deal of impact. People can turn off lights and our buildings are automatically set to turn off lights at night. We can turn off our computers and our IT department has made turning off computers at night a standard operating procedure. We also are looking into things such as duplex printing, viewing and working in documents electronically, and using remanufactured toner cartridges. Identifying opportunities in our operations to reduce waste, to reduce toxins, and to reduce energy and water use will help us to become more sustainable.

*[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*