



24 Sustainability Success Stories in 2024

Story 7 of 24: Earth Day Celebrations

UPMC Children's is Kicking the Can in Celebration of Earth Month

This April, we want to share a story about a project that will make you and our planet a little healthier.

At UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, [Dr. Leigh Anne DiCicco](#) launched the "Kick the Can" campaign last fall. She was inspired after noticing the number of individual garbage cans that needed to be serviced by EVS every weeknight. UPMC Environmental Services protocol is to change out each bag, regardless of a can's fullness, to ensure there is no odor. So, each night, the 51 small garbage cans on her office floor had their bags changed.

She did the math and estimated that if the 51 cans on her office floor were changed five days per week, all year, it would lead to roughly 13,260 trash bags used on just her floor in just one year. This number of bags, weighing 350 pounds, could take up to a thousand years to decompose in a landfill. The carbon emissions from producing those bags are equivalent to those generated by charging 48,000 smartphones or driving a mid-size gasoline-powered car for over 1,100 miles (the same as driving from Pittsburgh to Fort Lauderdale, Florida).

As a result, Dr. DiCicco decided to "kick the can" and invited her colleagues to do the same. Working with CHP's EVS staff, Dr. DiCicco and many other employees in her department volunteered to give up their personal garbage cans. Larger cans were placed at regular intervals for groups of offices or cubicles. The win was two-fold: EVS staff could now save time and energy by emptying only a handful of cans, and employees had an extra way to take a small break from long periods of sitting, boosting circulation and cognition.

The project has quickly gained traction, with over 100 cans being "kicked" throughout CHP's administrative offices. Participating in the program is voluntary at CHP. Employees can also bring their own mini-can to their workspace. They would be responsible for emptying it into the large office bin at the end of each day. While there are variations in how individual trash cans are emptied across the UPMC system, the UPMC Center for Sustainability is looking to expand the project to non-clinical areas system-wide.

Inspired by the program at Children's, UPMC Carlisle launched its own campaign. Laura Soper, team leader of Carlisle's Sustainability Team, worked with hospital leaders to organize a week to turn in personal trash cans. From March 18 to March 22, administrative offices at UPMC Carlisle reduced the number of trash cans in their workspace and started using a shared can. They collected 24 small trash cans, and several offices now have one or two larger cans, rather than one per desk.

"Kick the Can" is an easy way for UPMC employees to reduce unnecessary waste and address workflow demands on our EVS staff. While one personal garbage can may not look like much, "kicking it" can save up to 260 bags per year!

To learn more about this project and how to adopt it, write to crumsm@upmc.edu and share your office's "Kick the Can" project on the [Sustainable UPMC Viva Engage page](#).