



Articles & Features

April 12, 2010

MVAMC's Going Green "Waste Watcher" Program Earns VA Sustainability Achievement Award

By Kevin L. McIver — Public Affairs Officer

MARTINSBURG, W.Va. — The Department of Veterans Affairs recently announced that the Martinsburg VA Medical Center's Nutrition and Food Service Staff achieved the honor and distinction of becoming a VA Sustainability Achievement Award winner.

"The announcement of this coveted award is truly an honor for our staff and we are extremely proud of our "Going Green" efforts through our highly successful waste reduction and composting practices," said Medical Center Director Ann R. Brown.

In a letter to MVAMC's Chief of Nutrition and Food Service Barbara Hartman, VA Senior Sustainability Officer James M. Sullivan praised staff as "an excellent example to other VA facilities on how to employ innovative waste reduction strategies."

According to Hartman, the Waste Watchers program is based on the EPA's Food Waste Hierarchy, which has an end result of reducing food

waste that saves money, and decreases the amount of food that ends up in landfills creating methane gas.

"Receiving this award," said Hartman, "recognizes and validates the importance of proper food waste management to the environment."

The path leading to the Martinsburg's Waste

Watchers began in 2004, when Hartman was the newly appointed chief.

"The staff started thinking about better ways to help the environment," said Hartman. "This award recognizes their hard work in following the waste management procedures on a daily basis. They have become

experts in the EPA Food Waste Hierarchy and are providing a model for other food service operations to follow. This is their program."

Before the program, approximately 1,521 pounds of solid food waste was created per week. Now it is down to less than 300 pounds.



MVAMC Nutrition and Food Service Dietician Annemarie Price holding one of the Waste Watcher food bags.

Photo: VA

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)



Larry Allen, left foreground, and Cam Tabb working with boxes to transport food waste. A farmer in Jefferson County, Tabb works closely with staff.

Photo: VA

“We’ve reduced waste by 80 percent,” said Hartman, “through tracking food waste electronically to improve production forecasting, by donating food, and through our food scrap collection for composting program.”

In addition to the nationally-recognized Waste Watchers program, the MVAMC has had an existing “Green Kitchen Project” for the procurement of local sustainably grown fresh produce with Kilmer Farms in Berkeley County, W.Va.



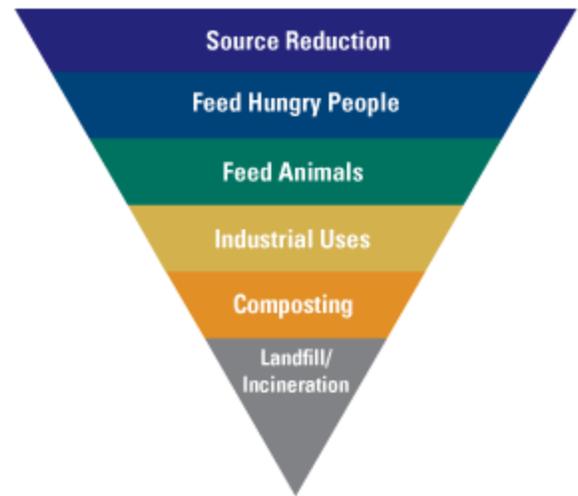
MVAMC Nutrition and Food Service Worker Charles Tibbs preparing food waste for the program.

Photo: VA

“Winning this award places our Medical Center among the leaders in the Veterans Health Administration and the food service industry in proper food waste management, and it positions us to share our procedures with other operations,” said Hartman.

A special recognition ceremony for the award-winning project team will be held during VA’s Earth Day presentation on April 20 in Washington, D.C.

Food Waste Recovery Hierarchy



The EPA and USDA recommend following the “food waste recovery hierarchy” as the preferred options to make the most of excess food.

The food waste recovery hierarchy comprises the following activities, with disposal as the last, and least preferred, option:

Source Reduction

- Reduce the amount of food waste being generated.

Feed People

- Donate excess food to food banks, soup kitchens and shelters.

Feed Animals

- Provide food scraps to farmers.

Industrial Uses

- Provide fats for rendering or fuel and food discards for animal feed production.

Composting

- Recycle food scraps into a nutrient rich soil amendment.

Source: EPA