



'Greening' VA: Serving Veterans Sustainably

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In my capacity as VA's senior sustainability officer and director of Asset Enterprise Management—with the support of staff across the Department—I oversee VA's large capital asset portfolio (buildings, land and infrastructure) and promote environmentally sustainable practices at every level of our organization. In short, we work collectively and collaboratively to "green" VA and maintain the Department's federal leadership role in sustainability.

Sustainability is the capacity to endure—to preserve the potential for long-term maintenance of health and well-being, which extends beyond our physical infrastructures and environment to our way of life. To promote sustainability is to actively choose to make green practices part of our culture through our daily actions and behavior—at work, at home, and everything we do in between, from traveling and commuting to the purchases we make.

VA has a clear, uncompromising mission: to care for and provide quality benefits and services to veterans and their families. I believe incorporating sustainability into our capital asset management practices is simply a better approach to the stewardship of the resources the American people have entrusted to us. Going green means safeguarding our national security by reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and, more basic than that, doing the right thing every day—for the environment, the communities in which we live and serve, and most im-

portantly, for veterans.

The Department has set some ambitious greening goals at the corporate level. We are aiming for a 30 percent reduction in our Scope 1 and Scope 2 greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2020, and a 10 percent reduction in our Scope 3 emissions. (Scope 1 and 2 emissions are those that result directly or indirectly from VA activities; Scope 3 emissions are those that occur as a result of agency activities, such as employee travel.)

To accomplish these goals, we have developed a Strategic Sustainability Performance Plan (available on our Web site, at www.green.va.gov) that details the mission-specific challenges we face and our

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approach to addressing them. On a larger scale, VA is installing solar, wind, geothermal and other renewably fueled energy systems on-site at facilities nationwide—15 percent of the Department's electricity consumption will be clean energy, fueled by renewable sources, by 2013. For a map and locations of these renewable energy projects, visit our Web site.

VA is greening its buildings, both new and existing, with the goal of reaching a 15 percent sustainable inventory by 2015. Currently, 25 facilities have received independent, third-party certification as green—four through the Leadership in Energy and Environ-

mental Design program and 21 through the Green Globes program. As of 2009, all new major construction projects require LEED silver certification in project specifications.

To increase the energy efficiency of our buildings, we are replacing windows, roofs and other building components with energy-saving products, and improving the existing energy infrastructure, including heating, cooling, ventilation, steam and electrical distribution systems. VA has already reduced its energy intensity by 12.3 percent since 2003, and we plan to achieve a further 3 percent reduction each year.

We are also greening our fleet of motor vehicles.

management; and GHG emissions reduction, which cuts across all program areas and organizational elements.

These program areas represent our corporate approach to sustainability. Under the auspices of these programs, VA centrally administers and coordinates Department-wide policy and greening initiatives. Just as important as these large-scale measures is the grassroots approach to greening VA promoted through the Green Routine initiative.

This initiative harnesses the participation of employees at all levels by promoting and recognizing green practices in daily actions and decisions. If the Department's approach to sustainability were limited

VA has already acquired 400 hybrid sedans and nearly 150 alternative-fuel vehicles. The Veterans Health Administration and National Cemetery Administration are planning to substantially increase the use of electric vehicles at their facilities. To meet the fueling needs of this green fleet, VA has begun the installation of up to 91 ethanol-based fueling stations at facilities nationwide.

VA's sustainability goals are administered through the Green Management Program, which is comprised of five program areas: energy and water management; environmental management; fleet management; sustainable buildings

only to large-scale, highly visible projects such as solar panel and wind turbine installations, our greening efforts would be incomplete and fall short of our goals.

Such simple steps as printing double-sided, turning off your PC monitor when not in use, recycling, and purchasing green products and energy-efficient electronics contribute to VA's sustainability goals.

Remember, by helping VA go green, you are helping us do the right thing every day. We ask you to engage with us in greening VA, and if you have suggestions, ideas or questions, e-mail us at GreenVA@va.gov.