University Hospitals Health System

Benefits

• Over $760,000 spent on furnishings free of HHI-chemicals of concern, representing 71 percent of total spend from reporting vendors.
• Data collection from 87 percent of major furniture vendors supplying UH.
• Clearer understanding of how and where to reduce exposure of patients and employees to known chemicals of concern.
• Collaboration with suppliers to develop internal “healthy furniture catalog” to simplify purchasing process for UH employees.
• Engagement by facility leaders in providing a more sustainable, safer experience for patients and employees:

Through the HHI Safer Chemicals Healthy Interiors Goal, we at UH Bedford Medical Center demonstrate our wholehearted commitment to the safety of our patients, staff and visitors, as well our devotion to our natural environment. Our Core Values of Excellence and Integrity shine through as we proudly meet this challenge.

Wayne Aiken, Director of Support Services
UH Bedford Medical Center & UH Richmond Medical Center
Campuses of UH Regional Hospitals

Challenge/Situation

Certain medical and nonmedical furnishings within a health care environment may contain chemicals that pose a threat to human and environmental health. To address this concern, all of University Hospitals’ major medical centers have committed to the Healthier Hospitals Initiative Safer Chemicals Challenge with the intention of avoiding in furnishings the use of halogenated flame retardants, formaldehyde, perfluorinated compounds, and PVC (vinyl), all of which are associated with a range of adverse health effects. Preferring products that avoid these chemicals helps UH improve its indoor air quality and promote human and environmental health. UH’s Healthy Interiors effort supports its mission to protect patient and community health, and is consistent with its clinical history of leadership, for example, in pediatric health advocacy.
In 2014, UH was among leading health systems nationwide to commit to avoiding the purchase of furniture containing chemical flame retardants, including carcinogenic and neurodevelopmental toxicants, while still meeting fire safety codes. We hope that these efforts help to transform the national supply chain to provide healthier products for all.

**Strategy/Actions**

Prioritizing healthier furnishing purchases at UH has required systematic education, policy development, and multi-departmental support, and has included the following strategies:

- Adoption of a sustainable design, construction, and renovation policy that prioritizes avoidance of chemicals of concern in our furnishings and interiors.
- Development of a method of internally tracking furniture purchases to regularly evaluate opportunities at the facility and system level, and track progress toward Healthy Interiors goals.
- Clear communication of our goals with all current and prospective furniture vendors so that HHI-compliant alternatives can be provided.
- Standardization of supply chain furniture catalogues to provide HHI-compliant products as first options for buyers.

**Implementation Process**

Using the late-2012 commitment to the Healthier Hospitals Initiative as a catalyst, multi-departmental working groups were formed system wide to implement strategies for driving better outcomes in each HHI Challenge Area. Representatives from system supply chain, facilities and construction, safety, and the office of sustainability were convened to meet on a monthly basis to address Safer Chemicals and Smarter Purchasing outcomes.

Simultaneously, a working group made up of the same stakeholders met several times in 2013 to create a new sustainable construction, renovation, and maintenance policy that prioritizes Healthy Interiors goals for construction and facilities projects. As a result of these collaborations, UH now requires suppliers of exam tables, patient recliners, mattresses, foams, panel fabrics, cubicle curtains, window coverings, fabric upholstery, and built-in modular casework to complete custom made templates containing information on the products’ chemical and material ingredients. A system level contract administrator manages communication with all furniture vendors to ensure that the Healthy Interiors goals are clearly articulated and templates are completed for UH’s system sustainability reporting dashboard on a quarterly basis.
To further legitimize hospital priorities, in September of 2014, UH also made a pledge through HHI’s Market Transformation Group with major health systems nationwide to buy furniture free of flame retardants for all fully sprinklered spaces.

The Healthier Interiors working group meets independently with furniture vendors to incorporate HHI-compliant product options into a catalogue for UH purchasers, addressing the clear need to consistently convey standards at the point of purchase to buyers within the UH system.

**Lessons Learned/Recommendations**

**Data gathering and tracking**
Asking vendors to share whether or not their products contain HHI chemicals of concern was typically a novel “ask” that required legwork on the hospital side. Stakeholders at UH held several meetings with vendors to educate the companies about facility needs. UH ultimately developed a customized product template to be completed by vendors for use in the system’s sustainability reporting dashboard. While the vendor template completion rate has been high, detailed product specifications validating what has been stated in the template have been received for some but not 100 percent of products purchased. To supplement the template, HHI’s document entitled “Guidance to Achieve HHI Safer Chemicals Challenge for Healthy Interiors” is now shared with suppliers in order to verify compliance. Working with vendors to assist with tracking and reporting, as well as educating UH staff about the challenge of creating an internal infrastructure and knowledge base around tracking and reporting, has been labor intensive.

**Ensuring Healthy Interiors standards reach all buyers within UH’s major medical centers**
UH continues to work with vendors to incorporate Healthy Interiors standards into a purchasing catalogue, but it has been challenging to share these new purchasing standards with all of the buyers throughout the large health system. There are many different parties responsible for purchasing furnishings, such as construction services, facilities, materials management, and other various departments across the system.

How does a large system facilitate and encourage people to make the right choices? This question led to the creation of a customized catalog, as well as a one-page educational memo that system Supply Chain has been using to communicate the HHI commitment to purchasers. One of the most important examples of how vendors can help UH reach its goals is for companies to clearly indicate up front in their product descriptions at the point of purchase whether the HHI Healthy Interiors goals are met.

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**The Team**
- Supply chain leadership and contract administrators
- Facilities/construction leadership
- Safety department
- Office of sustainability
- External online sustainability tracking dashboard partner
- Legal department
- Facility operations directors
More success meeting HHI goal in nonmedical furnishings

To date, it has been easier to meet the HHI criteria with freestanding nonmedical furnishing purchases as compared to medical furnishing purchases because major suppliers in nonmedical furnishings have been leading the way in addressing safer chemicals and sustainability issues for a long time. While UH hopes nationwide efforts like HHI can help drive both industries toward healthier options, the nonmedical furnishing marketplace is further along in this regard.

Stakeholder engagement

Multi-stakeholder engagement has been critical to UH’s progress in this effort. Ongoing communication by clinical and sustainability leadership about the environmental, health, and long-term cost savings benefits of HHI-compliant products has been necessary to answer the question of “why” UH is taking on this challenge. With this education, supply chain representatives with established vendor relationships were able to communicate UH’s Healthy Interiors goals externally and continue to acquire the necessary chemical ingredient data for furnishings.