

## Case Study: Safer Chemicals - Healthy Interiors Goal



### Summary

University Hospitals (UH) is committed to environmental sustainability and signed onto all six Challenges of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative (HHI), including the Safer Chemicals Challenge.

The Safer Chemicals Challenge includes a goal to reduce the use of furnishings containing polyvinyl chloride (PVC), halogenated flame retardants, perfluorinated compounds (PFC) and formaldehyde.

University Hospitals was able to report that 71 percent of target furnishings purchased in 2014 contained safer alternatives through collaboration with suppliers to develop an internal “healthy furniture” catalog and to simplify purchasing processes for UH employees in order to institutionalize the goal.

## 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.

## About University Hospitals

University Hospitals, the second largest employer in Northeast Ohio with 25,000 employees, serves the needs of patients through an integrated network of 15 hospitals, 29 outpatient health centers and primary care physician offices in 15 counties. At the core of our \$3.5 billion health system is University Hospitals Case Medical Center, ranked among America's 50 best hospitals by U.S. News & World Report in all 12 methodology-ranked specialties. The primary affiliate of Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, UH Case Medical Center is home to some of the most prestigious clinical and research centers of excellence in the nation, including cancer, pediatrics, women's health, orthopedics, radiology, neuroscience, cardiology and cardiovascular surgery, digestive health, transplantation and genetics. Its main campus includes UH Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, ranked among the top children's hospitals in the nation; UH MacDonald Women's Hospital, Ohio's only hospital for women; and UH Seidman Cancer Center, part of the NCI-designated Case Comprehensive Cancer Center at Case Western Reserve University.

For more information, go to [www.uhhospitals.org](http://www.uhhospitals.org).

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.

## 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

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.

### **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.