





The Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) lab recycling programme has been set up to deal with the materials in labs that can be recycled. The motivation behind the program was to divert lab packaging into recycling. So much packaging waste is generated as part of processes and the team wanted to tackle the issue..

The MUSC Lab Recycling Program was the brainchild of the Engineering and Facilities Unit. The project initially started out as part of the LEAN process. A project process that was both VP supported and MUSC; it was structured to help identify opportunity, measure impact and analyze a problem.

John Brooker, Sustainability Communications, says “From there, the program took root and began picking up momentum through different partnerships: administrators and researchers, the CFO, business manager, and housekeeping. As well as working with OSHA occupational safety and health”.



As the Team assembled, a goal was created: to divert lab related plastic, glass, and metal from the landfill and increase confidential paper shredding and recycling. The initial target was to gather plastic, glass, metal from labs and educate employees about the recycling process and program.

“Since it is a voluntary program, departments are initially contacted and told about the program, they then become partners through a training where the employees are given a run-down of the program’s process” said John. The training complies with safety compliance standards like USEPA, the South Carolina DHEC, OSHA, Department of Transportation, MUSC, and JCAHO Standards.



Like all good ideas, The MUSC Lab Recycling Program also had small setbacks. Handling lab equipment, especially those that are hazardous can be tricky. Safety is generally in charge of picking up hazardous materials, while the recycling team handles potentially useful materials. Safety is paramount in laboratory recycling which is why the training given to the lab also covers handling dangerous waste. Despite the preliminary success, it can take a while for word about the program to get around, a setback that will hopefully be augmented by the trainings conducted. John went on “The challenge with the size of the university is mostly with finding a comprehensive and up-to-date list of labs and to know when labs change or get new staff. It makes it difficult to keep the lab staff educated”.



When asked about what particular benefit could be considered best gathered from the program, John said the established rapport and the trust being built in the lab community was a welcome surprise. The tangible paybacks of the cost savings and the diversion of recyclable materials are impressive, especially since it was calculated that there could be a potential savings of $6,000 per year per 100 recycling bins. John added , “You can decrease the amount of hazardous and general waste loads that MUSC is paying for to be taken to the landfill or special decontamination treatment.”



John mentions that the program, while currently voluntary will hopefully be picked up and be deemed mandatory for all units. John’s Top Tip for anyone looking to create lab recycling programs is that the main lead should have a lab background . John said “they would need to come from the ranks so as to understand the processes of the units they will be overseeing”.