

# The Climate Chronicles

March 2024 - Making a long-term commitment to organizational sustainability

## Climate Resiliency at Northern Light Health

How climate change effects our operations as we see an increase in unpredictable weather events



When Northern Light Health signed The White House/HHS Health Sector Climate Pledge last April, one of the things we were committing to was developing an organizational climate resiliency plan.

Planning for climate resiliency involves considering the potential for challenges and risks associated with long-term climate change, assessing our preparedness for and ability to respond to them, and identifying opportunities and strategies to address any gaps. For a healthcare system like Northern Light Health, a comprehensive approach considering climate-driven risks to both the built environment and the people of Maine made sense.

Our network of ten hospitals spanning the vast geography of the state exposes us to a variety of climate-driven risks that vary with each location. While Northern Light Mercy and Blue Hill Hospitals face challenges related to their proximity to the ocean, such as high wind, coastal flooding, and long-term sea level rise, our more rural facilities like Northern Light Mayo and CA Dean Hospitals are threatened by disruptions to transportation, utility, and supply networks during extreme weather events. Our patients and employees also face unique, climate-driven challenges as our state's population grapples with poverty, housing and food insecurity, and high rates of chronic diseases, all of which can be exacerbated by climate change. (Cont. on page 2)

## Responsible Sourcing

Responsible sourcing for the materials we use is a large part of our plan for to reduce waste. Forming partnerships with suppliers who can support our mission is critical to progress. Mary McCarthy, AVP Supply Chain Programs and Partnerships, has updated an existing survey that new vendors complete to include questions about their efforts to reduce environmental impact and improve social equity. (Cont. on page 2)

## How can I get my charge?

An update on EV Charging stations on campuses

Electrifying our fleet of vehicles at Northern Light Health has been a priority as we transition from gasoline and diesel-powered vehicles, which means there is a need for electric vehicle (EV) charging stations. There is also a growing demand from staff and patients who would like to be able to charge their vehicle while inside the hospitals or office buildings.

So far, there have been charging stations installed at pharmacy sites for delivery vehicles. There is a single station at Northern Light Sebecook Valley Hospital, and a dual station at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center for Clinical Engineering. We also have two charging stations for the Biomedical Engineering Department at the Lafayette Family Cancer Institute/Cianchette campus. Up next is a single charging station for Northern Light Mayo Hospital in Dover-Foxcroft for company vehicles. (Cont. on page 2)



“Celebrating seasons is also celebrating our endurance: to keep going, to outlast dark days, both figuratively and literally, and no skill is more essential for dealing with the climate crisis than resilience.”

- Alison Stine, Writer

# Desflurane Reduction in the Operating Room

Positive progress made towards KPI goal to reduce use of gas by 50%



Did you know that the anesthesia gases used at Northern Light Health contribute to our carbon

footprint? One of them, desflurane, is particularly damaging, with a global warming potential 2540 times higher than an equivalent volume of carbon dioxide. Many hospitals around the world have successfully phased out or reduced the use of desflurane, and our System has taken on the challenge. We have a key performance indicator (KPI) to reduce the use of desflurane at our hospitals by 50% during the 2024 fiscal year. And, since desflurane is also the most expensive anesthetic gas we use, successfully meeting our KPI goal will not only get us closer to our sustainability goals but will also save us money.

Dr. Sarah Smith, Chief of Anesthesia at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, championed an effort last fall involving enhanced data collection and targeted education of anesthesia providers. The data that's been collected provides a better understanding of who uses desflurane, for what sorts of cases, and why. This information allows us to develop strategies for moving away from desflurane while keeping the concerns of providers and quality of care at the forefront. Building on the momentum at EMMC, we are now rolling out the initiative to the other ORs in the System. Although we are not yet halfway through the fiscal year, we have reason to believe these efforts are making an impact; we saw a 30% reduction in desflurane use by March and are on-track to meet our KPI!

## Have something to share?



Do you have a story or resource you'd like to share with the team?

Send all information to [bespeed@northernlight.org](mailto:bespeed@northernlight.org) to be included in the next newsletter.

## "Climate Resiliency" continued from page 1

Northern Light Health's Climate Resiliency Plan was released in December, and documents these and other issues we face, as well as action items to address them. The plan is available publicly at [Northernlighthealth.org/Sustainability](http://Northernlighthealth.org/Sustainability). We anticipate revising the plan regularly, as new threats emerge and others are effectively planned for, so feel free to pass along commentary and insights, and thanks to everyone who contributed to the process!

## "EV Charging Stations" continued from page 1

However, when it comes to charging stations for staff and public use, it gets complicated. Electrical consumption that is not paid for up front is considered taxable income. EV charging station owners and lessees must pay a combined excise tax and surtax fee of \$0.03 per kilowatt hour of electricity used. For these reasons, as well as the cost of installation, a third-party partnership is a much more feasible approach.

A good example is a partnership we have with a local business in Presque Isle that utilized an Efficiency Maine grant for Northern Light AR Gould in Presque Isle where we have a commercial grade fast charging station. The local business will manage this station, and handle billing to patrons, while Efficiency Maine provided the grant since it is along a remote section of Route 1. The total investment from this business for this single station is more than \$100,000.

We continue to look for grants and community partnerships that incentivize charging stations and are open to participating with private companies who would install and operate them.

## "Responsible Sourcing" continued from page 1

The hope is that information gathered will help Northern Light make purchasing decisions that align with our system goals. Lumere is the software platform we use to ask questions of potential vendors. According to Lumere, we are the first organization in the country to include these type of questions using their platform. Mary's efforts demonstrate creative problem solving needed to accomplish our goals.