

# Healthcare and the Triple Bottom Line

## Caring for people, profits, and the planet we all share.

By Ron Pierce, President, WM Healthcare Solutions, Inc.

*Healthcare facilities have an imperative to manage the bottom line. But does this have to come at the expense of social and environmental principles? How can the three live in harmony?*

### **Healthcare and Sustainability.**

Today, forward-thinking companies, including healthcare organizations, are measuring themselves not according to one bottom line, but three: Their financial, community and environmental activities. The object of the triple bottom line, as it is known, is to further the goal of sustainability – for the organization, for people, and for the planet itself.

It's become clear that successful healthcare facilities are those that excel not just in the people and planet categories, but in profits as well. At the same time, a company's "good" environmental and social behaviors have to make sense financially or they're doomed before they ever get off the ground.

So what sets a triple-bottom-line healthcare facility apart?

### **It broadens the concept of "capital!"**

For this facility, "capital" includes the natural resources that make up the organization's physical plant and supply its daily activities. The paper, metal, glass, cardboard, electronics, plastics and many other materials are not things to get rid of when they've served their intended purpose, but part of a "closed-loop" cycle of

endless value. Sustainable healthcare facilities discover profitable opportunities in the "Four Rs" – *reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering* resources.

### **It roots out inefficiency.**

It looks for ways to save energy and preserve natural resources. Healthcare facilities generate enormous amounts of waste. Much of it is environmentally hazardous and requires special treatment. But 80% of waste generated by healthcare facilities is non-infectious solid waste. And some of this is treated as medical waste – which is far more expensive to handle. Sustainable healthcare facilities train employees to segregate waste correctly, often directing it from higher-cost into lower-cost categories such as recycling and solid waste.

### **It safeguards its employees, patients, and the community.**

Minimizing risk and liability for all stakeholders must be a priority. Whether you deal with potentially infectious waste, hazardous chemicals and pharmaceuticals or confidential document destruction, you must maintain a superior level of safety.

### **It's being a good citizen.**

A triple-bottom-line facility protects its good name by preserving and enriching the environment and protecting people, pets and wildlife from the hazards of the medical waste it generates.

### **It welcomes accountability.**

There is no immunity from public or governmental scrutiny. Sustainable healthcare facilities operate transparently and adopt practices that benefit all stakeholders.

## The Triple Bottom Line in Action

Washington County Healthcare System  
Hagerstown, Maryland

When this 341-bed hospital was preparing to move to a new facility, they called Waste

Management to quote on providing bulk containers to get rid of "a whole lot of useless materials." Waste Management and the hospital instead worked together to find ways to reuse, recycle, donate or shred the materials. Floor tiles, lighting, carpet, sinks, shelving, office equipment, and hundreds of stainless steel bedpans would all be given a second life.

The environment benefited from the four tons of metal recovered for reuse. And five truckloads of materials were donated to ReStore, a Habitat for Humanity building-supply store. The donations would cover 25% of the cost of a new house for a needy family in the community. All in all, it was a three-way win for people, the planet, and profits.

**For more information, call a Waste Management Healthcare Solutions specialist at 1-877-383-8539. Or visit [healthcare.wm.com](http://healthcare.wm.com).**

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