

Turning Green Rock GREEN

A Proposal for Recycling and Sustainability

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As is often the case in America, the west sets the trends and they slowly creep east, with Virginia cautiously and conservatively adapting. This appears to be true with the concepts of energy-efficiency, recycling and sustainability. However, the Commonwealth is attempting to catch up and could very well surpass many states in the future and become a leader in this important and necessary field. Just last year an \$18 million contract was given to Johnson Controls, Inc., a Milwaukee-based company hired to upgrade the water and energy systems in eleven Virginia Correctional facilities. Spawned from this effort is a new sustainability training program at Indian Creek Correctional Center. The Commonwealth of Virginia in general, and Director Clarke specifically, know that recycling, sustainability and energy efficiency is the way of the future. Furthermore, adopting these policies can very much work in harmony with the goals of public safety, rehabilitation and re-entry of productive members back into the community.

The Department of Corrections has given contracts to certain waste management companies and have set some standards for each institution to follow, yet every institution is free to further expand upon their respective recycling/sustainability operations. Leading the change at Green Rock is Unit Manager Collins who, in addition of his other duties, is attempting to bring Green Rock into the 21st century waste management demands. Mr. Collins is but one man and to begin turning Green Rock GREEN, will take a cooperative effort by both the staff and offenders.

Either directly or indirectly everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends on our natural environment. The Environmental Protection Agency states that "Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations." Recycling, which saves money, reduces the amount of waste that gets thrown into landfills and conserves resources, is the first step in sustainability. Recycling also saves energy. For example, recycling aluminum cans back into new ones only uses about one tenth of the energy needed to make new cans from scratch out of bauxite ore. Recycling should be made as convenient as possible for everyone at Green Rock. At the very least, an evolving recycling program must become a part of the daily operations of Green Rock.

Every teacher and staff member whom I have spoken to, from the Librarian to the Chaplain and from Correctional Officers to the Maintenance Foreman, have said they would be more than happy to participate in a Green Rock sustainability program. Even better than recycling, the VOTECH classes especially, are avoiding waste being created in the first place by becoming virtually paper-free. Mr. Arn, Green Rock's Computer Aided Design Instructor, has volunteered to create and print posters to help in the process of turning Green Rock GREEN. Such posters hung around the institution could promote enthusiasm and cooperation by staff, offenders and visitors for participating in a sustainability program.

Obviously Green Rock has unique safety and security concerns and constrictions which businesses and other governmental institutions do not have to contend with. However, this should not be an excuse for Green Rock to not fully participate in a sustainability program. With many staff members and countless Green Rock inhabitants who would gladly become active in any effort to turn Green Rock GREEN, perhaps a "G.R.C.C. GREEN Committee" of volunteers could help develop strategies toward bringing this facility up to and beyond what is required of an institution in the 21st century; to make this correctional facility environmentally sound. The economic cost is negligible and the environmental benefits are tremendous.

Recycling of paper, plastic, aluminum and cardboard is the most obvious first steps and apparently Mr. Collins will be working toward this goal. Yet, many additional activities should be considered. Quite a few VADOC institutions utilize a "Green Screen" in order to communicate with the offender population via closed-circuit television system. This not only allows the Warden, et al., to directly, clearly and quickly communicate with the whole of Green Rock, but it alleviates the necessity of posting paper memos in each living area. The "Green Screen" itself, which could be set up at no cost and employed by the Librarian, Chaplain, Educational Department, etc., could also promote Green Rock's sustainability program.

A “Green Kiosk”, an idea that has already been considered at G.R.C.C., could potentially alleviate much of the offender paperwork (e.g., Request forms, Commissary forms, Property forms etc.), saving money, non-renewable resources and the environment. Knowing that sustainability is the future, though, why not take more bold steps and set precedence in this field. The following are further suggestions that could be developed at Green Rock for its GREEN sustainability program:

- Organic Composting With little cooperation, the kitchen could begin to separate organic waste from non-organic waste. The organic waste could then be used for composting. Composting of organic waste can create a valuable soil conditioner while at the same time avoid methane emissions from landfills. This material could be given to an outside organization or, since Green Rock has at least twenty acres of unused land within the perimeter fence and numerous acres outside of the institution, any of it could be used for composting. Additionally, this could possibly lead to an increasingly productive organic garden on the premises (a “Re-entry Garden”), an idea that is today already implemented at certain VADOC institutions.
- Water Catchment Basins Rainwater runoff from the roofs of various building could be captures and used to supplement some of the secondary water needs of the institution.
- Greater Energy Efficiency There are various ways in which Green Rock might cut energy consumption without compromising security. Green Rock vehicles and other appliances could be replaced with more energy-efficient ones (some prisons even use motorless lawn mowing). The lighting, if using energy-efficient light bulbs, could also be evaluated rationally as to when they are necessary. For example, on weekends, lights inside the living areas are allowed to be dimmed and with a total of 532 cells at G.R.C.C., just the dimming of lights, perhaps during daylight hours on weekdays also, could drastically reduce electrical consumption. Most institutions allow offenders to control the lights in their cells, which helps cut down energy use.
- Solar and Wind Power The Riverside Correctional Facility of Philadelphia prison System recently installed 45 solar panels to heat 15 storage tanks, which provides domestic hot water for 768 inmates. It is estimated that over the course of the next 25 years such a system will provide energy savings of 20-25% annually, saving an estimated \$1.1 million and one million pounds of carbon emissions. Efficient wind turbines could be strategically placed on the barrier hills or fields surrounding G.R.C.C. Solar and/or wind energy could be harnessed and supplement Green Rock’s energy needs Recently, the solar panels installed at the Ironwood State Prison in Blythe, California, sends enough energy back to the grid to power 4,100 homes a year. A single wind turbine installed in one Indiana prison generates around 10 kilowatts of energy an hour, saving the prison over \$2,000 annually.
- Cell Phone Recycling Program Drop boxes could be located at the entrance areas of Green Rock where staff members could recycle their old cell phones. Some phones can be rehabbed, reprogrammed and donated to charities, others would be disposed of in an environmentally approved manner by the E.P.A. If the phone has any monetary value, Green Rock could receive the proceeds, to be donated to the general fund. Other prison systems have seen success with such programs.

Some of these proposed sustainability ideas may seem a bit bold and could take years to implement, yet some are very practical, economically free and very much essential. Green Rock is like a small city, operating 24/7. From housing to food service, to educational programs and industries, it can be extremely costly and energy-intensive. But we can lessen its impact. Green Rock can become more sustainable, by not only saving money and the environment, but also by setting an example to offenders, other institutions and to the citizens of the Commonwealth. There certainly are limitations to

what may be done at an institution such as Green Rock, but it is vital that Green Rock plays its part. We know being energy inefficient, how it will alter the Earth for future generations; we know that Director Clarke, and indeed, the entire Western World, is moving toward greater measures of sustainability, there is no excuse for delay.

This proposal is a wake-up call for every staff member and offender at Green Rock: now is the time to take action. Offender participation in these activities can improve behavior and deepen individual and institutional investment in sustainability. There is, however, above and beyond all of this, a more profound and compelling reason why we must institute an evolving sustainability program in which we all might contribute: we have a moral responsibility.

Clearly, I am passionate about this subject. If I can be of any further assistance in implementing or creating a sustainability program, I would be more than happy to help. Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal.