

GreenDentistry

Special Report: What you need to know about going green, part 1

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Association led by Dr. Fred Pockrass, a Canadian, supports dental professionals in making environmentally sound choices, whether it is ordering re-usable stainless steel suction tips instead of disposable plastic ones, or switching to washable cloth patient barriers instead of petroleum-based plastics. A practice can be certified as eco-friendly by the EDA following assessments of initiatives in the areas of dental process and procedures, office administration and marketing, and office design, furnishings, and construction. Dr. Farahani has been asked to serve as the Canadian president of the association (www.ecodentistry.org).

"Dental practices are more concerned [about the environment], and the trend is spreading," says Larry Town, national sales manager for Miele Canada, a company that manufactures washer-disinfectors for dental instruments, where instruments are cleaned and disinfected before the sterilization process. "They are increasingly cognizant about their electricity use, water consumption, and use of chemicals from a 'green' standpoint and from a cost-saving standpoint."

For its part, Miele Canada has adopted an approach so that it does not rely on chemicals a great deal. "Our philosophy has been to not heavily rely on chemicals, so that dental practices are able to reduce the amount of chemicals that the average practice flushes into the system," explains Town. The Sierra Club has labelled the dental industry as the third largest user of mercury in the U.S., using about 40 metric tonnes of mercury annually to produce silver amalgam fillings.

The phenomenon of 'greening' in dentistry in North America actually is fairly recent compared to the level of awareness in Europe, notes Town. "It is now catching on in North America, but there has been a push in Europe for a long time," says Town.

Andy Whitehead, vice-president of sales and marketing for CrossTex International, says the business case for a dental practice to go green may not be obvious, but practitioners need to take the long view that the upfront cost to starting a green practice, or converting an existing practice to a greener one, will save money in the long run for the practice, and that it will also be

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Case Study

When they moved their dental office from one location on Martindale Road in St. Catharines, Ont., to a larger space on Martindale Road, Dr. Lain Vendittelli and his partner Dr. Hamit S. Ranu implemented changes to be more eco-friendly.



"Our old office was crammed, and it didn't make sense to go green in that office," explains Dr. Vendittelli, who has been in practice for close to two decades. "The intention of moving into this facility was not to go green, but it made sense to do so."

Dr. Vendittelli found, however, that it was cost prohibitive for him to perform significant design renovations to be greener. "There is a federal grant system available to retrofit buildings, but not for buildings that are less than five years old," he says, noting that he may take advantage of the grant system if it is still in place when the building that houses his current practice turns five years old.

Salespeople have kept him informed of what is available in terms of green technology and green practices. "It was an education from [dental supplier] Henry Schein," says Dr. Vendittelli. "The



salespeople have kept us up to date, presenting us with the value of using new technology. The salespeople have kept us informed of what is available and what works."

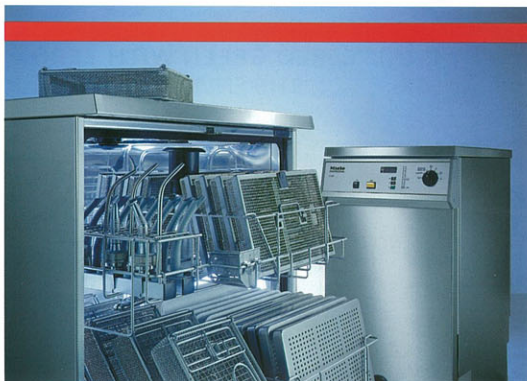
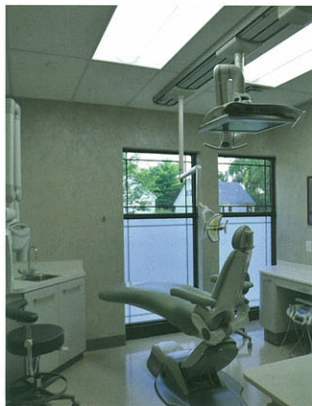
The incorporation of digital radiography into Martindale Dental has precluded the use of toxic processing chemicals, and many other offices are taking that approach and moving away from traditional radiography, according to Dr. Vendittelli.

"It is great because it allows us to see the images almost instantly," explains Dr. Vendittelli. "The amount of radiation is less, and we can treat patients much faster. The systems have become better, and the images have become sharper."

Another technology that he uses that is kinder to the environment is an amalgam separator. A hauler certified by Ontario's Ministry of the Environment picks up this particular class of waste. The practice also sterilizes its instruments in a more

environmentally-friendly fashion.

"Our standards are quite high, and the patients appreciate features like digital radiography," says Dr. Vendittelli. "We also explain how we have altered our process in sterilizing instruments."



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