

# How a Jail Is Making a Green City Greener: The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office Sustainable Jail Project

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Multnomah County (Oregon) Sheriff Dan Staton, elected to his first term in May 2010, faced the challenge of maintaining high quality public safety infrastructure with increasingly limited resources. The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office is a public service organization that provides civil, corrections, and law enforcement services to Multnomah County.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) operates two jails:

- The Multnomah County Detention Center (MCDC) is a 448-bed, maximum-security adult local correctional facility located in the Justice Center in downtown Portland. MCDC provides security, control, custody, and supervision of county, state, and federal prisoners. MCDC is also the intake or booking facility for all of Multnomah County.
- The Multnomah County Inverness Jail (MCIJ) is a medium-security adult correctional facility located in northeast Portland. With its 1,037 available jail beds, the MCIJ staff ensures proper custody, control, and supervision for county, state, and federal inmates in Multnomah County. MCIJ also serves as an inmate transportation hub for the Northwest Shuttle, which serves jails from Wisconsin westward. MCIJ operations include provisions for inmate services that incorporate and support opportunities for inmates to participate and focus on their reintegration back into the community as law-abiding and taxpaying citizens.

The Sustainable Jail Project initially began as an idea in late 2010, after the director of Multnomah County's Sustainability Office read an article on the Sustainability in Prison Project, a partnership between the Washington State Department of Corrections and Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington. The article was the catalyst for a conversation with Sheriff Staton about adapting the concept for the MCSO jails. The idea was to create a plan to capture current sustainability efforts and guide future sustainability actions within the jails.



That initial conversation led to the creation of the Sustainable Jail Project. Sheriff Staton embraced the Sustainable Jail Project as an innovative approach to finding new ways to increase cost efficiencies and decrease the environmental footprint of the Sheriff's Office jails.

Sheriff Staton turned to the MCSO Sustainability Team to formulate the framework for the Sustainable Jails Project. A sustainability-focused team had already been in place for several years, and the advent of the Sustainable Jail Project focused the team on more creatively pursuing sustainability opportunities within the jails. Members were recruited from other county departments outside of the Sheriff's Office, including Multnomah County Facilities, the medical department, and the Office of Sustainability. Representatives from the contract food service and waste/recycling providers also were recruited to participate. The team now consists of nine members from a cross-section of the Sheriff's Office and beyond. This interdepartmental team has enhanced communication between county departments and increased their coordination, which made it easier to implement new ideas and initiatives and laid the groundwork with early successes in introducing sustainable actions within the jails. The team has strong support from Sheriff Staton.

## Early Successes

One of the first successes for the MCSO Sustainability Team was eliminating the jails' use of over 800,000 disposable Styrofoam™ cups annually. Successfully switching from disposable cups to reusable cups in most areas of the jails was completed in 2010 and saves over \$11,000 each year.

Another success began with an MCSO Corrections Deputy who routinely observed inmates' use of freely available golf pencils and paper in the housing units. Oftentimes a barely used pencil and leftover paper were being thrown in the garbage instead of returned to the supply area in the dorm. The Sustainability Team recommended switching to issued note pads, envelopes, and flexible pens with washable ink. Inmates could purchase needed replacements from the commissary. This change eliminated the use of over 1.2 million golf pencils annually. Now the jails use fewer than 28,000 flexible pens each year, saving \$28,000 annually.

The flexible pens also had additional benefits. The ink washes off walls and out of inmate clothing much more easily than pencil graphite. Issuing notepad paper and envelopes also encouraged more thoughtful use of paper by the inmates, resulting in another \$20,000 in annual savings.

These ideas were generated by line staff, and they demonstrated how the MCSO Sustainability Team could act as the main conduit for ideas from line staff.

With these early successes in place, and a comprehensive Sustainable Jail Project plan written, the Sustainable Jail Project was officially launched and announced to the public in April 2012.

## Project Goals and Objectives

The jail's ambitious goals for the project are:

- To reduce waste and energy consumption at the MCSO jails;
- To save taxpayer dollars; and
- To educate inmates about sustainable practices such as recycling and responsible use of resources.

At the launch, Sheriff Staton noted: "I am proud of the service we provide to the community, and I believe that the Sustainable Jail Project represents the next step for cost-efficient and effective jail operations."

The Sustainable Jail Project specifically addresses the long-term impacts of the two MCSO jails on the environment, the local community, and the area's economy. The project identifies eight goals:

- Set the standard for sustainability in county jails.
- Increase sustainability education, outreach, and employee awareness in the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office.
- Reduce factors leading to recidivism by connecting inmates to sustainability.
- Reduce energy use.
- Reduce water use.
- Reduce generation of solid waste and increase recycling efforts.
- Support the local food system.
- Reduce use of toxic materials.

Inherent in these goals are core objectives applicable to Multnomah County Sheriff's Office sustainability programs:

- Encourage the development of new sustainable ideas, channeled through the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office Sustainability Committee, with continuing assistance from the county's Office of Sustainability.
- Provide training and education to staff and inmates.
- Establish and promote annual goals.
- Provide a central hub of sustainability knowledge in the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office Sustainability Committee.
- Establish partnerships with other governmental and educational entities.
- Measure and report achievements to ensure successes are highlighted and credit is given for good works.

Invited guests at the launch were shown how the two jails are much like mini-cities that operate “24/7,” providing custody and care, educational programs, and laundry service for more than 1,200 inmates every day. As a result, jails typically are large consumers of energy, water, and supplies as well as large producers of waste.

### Snapshot: Laundry Water Recycling System

A good example of the resource-intensive nature of jails is the Inverness Jail laundry. An audit revealed that the facility was the second-largest energy consumer, per square foot, in the county’s 131-building portfolio. This was no surprise considering that annually more than 1 million pounds of inmate laundry are washed and dried at the MCSO laundry facility, including blankets for an area warming center for homeless persons.

Featured at the Sustainable Jail Project launch, a new laundry water recycling system that came online in February 2012 showed how saving natural resources could translate into a financial payback as well.

The \$600,000 cost of the project was funded through the following sources:

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act Grant	\$ 375,000
Energy Trust of Oregon Grant	5,000
Business Energy Tax Credit	44,000
Multnomah County funds	176,000
Total	\$ 600,000

The AquaRecycle<sup>®</sup> filtration system reclaims and reuses laundry wastewater. The system filtration and treatment process provides clean, disinfected, and pre-heated water to the washing machines. The system removes lint, minute solids, organics, detergents, oil and grease, odor, and other contaminants. The recycled water is disinfected and stored for the next wash cycle.

The stored water retains heat, which saves energy. The returning filtered water is already at 120 degrees Fahrenheit. As a result, the water boiler is not required to reheat the returning water from a tap temperature to the required 150 degrees Fahrenheit. The smaller temperature change required to heat the water saves considerable natural gas. The stored hot water also generates enough radiated heat to keep the laundry building at a comfortable temperature during the winter.

The laundry facility uses between 3 and 4 million gallons of water annually. The AquaRecycle<sup>®</sup> system is expected to save 80% of the water used in the laundry. Approximately 10% is lost to evaporation, and a portion is circulated to backwash the filters periodically. The system is currently estimated to be saving

about \$5,000 a month in additional laundry operating costs and should see increased cost avoidance as the system is optimized. Additional upgrades to the laundry facility have included energy efficient lighting with motion sensors that automatically turn off unneeded lighting, and Emergency Exit signs with super-efficient LED lights.

## More Facility Savings

The MCSO recognized early on that the smallest of electrical, natural gas, and water efficiencies, when added together, can have dramatic positive impact on overall utility costs. In 2009, the Multnomah County Facilities Department was awarded \$1.3 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grants for capital improvement projects. One major project involved installing a real-time monitoring system to track building energy use at both jails. With real-time monitoring, the Building Automation System improves climate control, air handling, and lighting. Installation was completed in 2012, and the MCSO is already realizing energy cost savings.

The jail kitchen is another place where efficiencies can be found. For example, recycling and composting protocols save approximately \$27,000 annually. Inmate kitchen workers ensure materials are properly separated.

Digital law library kiosks were installed in the jails in 2012. This allowed the closure of several law libraries maintained at the two jails. The resulting annual costs of replacing and updating law library books have been eliminated, and current versions of inmate legal resources now will be acquired via a software update. After one-time fixed installation costs in 2012 are subtracted, over \$36,000 in law library costs have been avoided this fiscal year.

In the year since the public launch, the Multnomah County Sheriff Office Sustainability Team has been hard at working implementing the goals of the Sustainable Jail Project. And the project is quickly becoming a catalyst for positive change in the MCSO as well as inspiring other jails and even state prison systems. For example, MCSO and Office of Sustainability staff have joined a burgeoning national coalition of state and county corrections departments to form a National Sustainability in Prisons Network. This project, which is being spearheaded by the University of Utah and Evergreen State College with funding from the National Science Foundation, has offered Multnomah County the chance to learn from other jurisdictions' innovative actions that could be applied in local jails.

For example, one tenet of the network is the principle of connecting inmates with nature. This year MCSO staff took a big step in connecting inmates to nature with the start of an inmate garden pilot project at the Multnomah County Inverness Jail. Inmates raised and cultivated vegetables that are donated to the Oregon Food Bank. In a partnership with the Oregon Food Bank, MCSO Corrections Program staff now offer a new "Seed to Supper" class curriculum that teaches inmates how to garden on a budget and promotes more active and healthy lifestyles through gardening.

*Multnomah County Sheriff Dan Staton, right, and County Chair Jeff Cogen harvest the first vegetables from the Sustainable Jails Project garden on June 20, 2013.*



## An Eye on the Future

These new programs are examples of how the Sheriff's Office is looking to go beyond green, with the goal to not only reduce the economic and environmental costs of incarceration, but to also address the human cost of jails. That means pursuing programming and partnerships that connect inmates with nature, match inmate needs with appropriate programming, and pursue innovations that create a safer environment for both inmates and staff.

The Sheriff's Office has a long history of providing proactive care to inmates. Sheriff's Office program staff aim to establish continuity of care and targeted programming that meets the agency's social equity goal, by decreasing overall jail confinement costs while also promoting successful transition from jail to the community. Corrections counselors, chaplains, volunteers, and education staff work together in order to positively impact the incarcerated population as they move through the jail system. In 2012 community volunteers logged 7,430 hours of service, and corrections staff were able to place 246 inmates into community-based provider treatment beds so they could get the services they needed.

The Multnomah County Sheriff's Office is showing the path of sustainability is not only technically feasible for correctional facilities but can also be cost-effective and help reduce the human cost of incarceration. The Sheriff's Office Sustainability Team received the Multnomah County Sustainability Award in 2011, and the Sustainable Jail Project was recognized with a National Association of Counties Achievement Award for sustainability in 2012. These awards recognize the leadership role that Sheriff Staton, and the Sheriff's Office as whole, have taken in pursuing greener, more cost-effective jail operations.

As the Sheriff's Office looks to the future, the plan is to build upon existing relationships, to strengthen and expand partnerships, and to look for new ways to innovate. Based on the successes to date, there is no doubt that great things are yet to come.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.sustainablejails.com](http://www.sustainablejails.com).

The full Sustainable Jail Project Plan is available online at <http://www.mcso.us/profiles/pdf/sustainablejailplan.pdf>

[This is a cover shot from the document]



Document available at:

[http://community.nicic.gov/blogs/national\\_jail\\_exchange/archive/2013/07/24/how-a-jail-is-making-a-green-city-greener-the-multnomah-county-sheriff-s-office-sustainable-jail-project.aspx](http://community.nicic.gov/blogs/national_jail_exchange/archive/2013/07/24/how-a-jail-is-making-a-green-city-greener-the-multnomah-county-sheriff-s-office-sustainable-jail-project.aspx)

*The National Jail Exchange is an ongoing electronic journal focusing on providing information to jails practitioners and is sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). The contents of the articles, the points of view expressed by the authors, and comments posted in reaction to the articles do not necessarily reflect the official views or policies of the National Institute of Corrections.*

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