



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Sustainability Plan

October 2022

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A. McDonough".

Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

2022 United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sustainability Plan

1. VA Sustainability Plan Summary

VA is committed to Federal sustainability and has embarked on an ambitious, comprehensive effort to achieve the goals of Executive Order (EO) 14057, “Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability,” and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-22-06, also titled “Catalyzing Clean Energy Industries and Jobs Through Federal Sustainability.” Significant work is already underway and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is increasing its efforts to revise policy and procedures and partner with other stakeholders to share knowledge, improve capacity and meet the goals of the Federal Sustainability Plan. Central to this effort is the formation of a Sustainability Task Force, chaired by VA’s Chief Sustainability Officer and comprised of senior VA leadership to allow for targets, strategies and the attendant changes required to policy to be vetted, deemed implementable and have cross-agency buy-in. VA is assessing its current progress relative to all the EO goals and is creating the coalitions necessary to respond when further guidance is received.

2. Priority Actions Towards Goals

A. One Hundred Percent Carbon Pollution-Free Electricity

VA anticipates a four-pronged approach towards carbon pollution-free electricity (CFE). First, VA will create policies to require more CFE at VA facilities and to incorporate CFE into construction projects. Second, VA will optimize the operation and maintenance of existing CFE systems. Third, VA will leverage all available contract vehicles, including energy performance contracts, to increase on-site CFE. The fourth prong is that VA will explore opportunities for additional off-site CFE through virtual power purchase agreements, utility incentives and other models. Using available data, VA will evaluate its current CFE consumption to include on-site renewables; grid-delivered CFE; purchased CFE; and purchased energy attribute certificates, as well as additional CFE potential based on a totality of factors such as resource availability and state regulatory frameworks.

VA began drafting policy in fiscal year (FY) 2022 to solidify the requirements for CFE consumption and approaches for achievement. VA will begin updating requirements to its Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process to set annual targets for facility/regional CFE and to provide guidance on how CFE can be acquired. This guidance will apply to next year’s SCIP process, which itself applies to projects seeking funding in FY 2025.

B. 100 Percent Zero-Emission Vehicle Fleet

VA has initiated efforts to transition its roughly 23,000 vehicle fleet to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs). In FY 2022, VA is focusing on initiating studies at VA-owned medical facilities to assess and plan for charging infrastructure and on acquiring solar electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE) that can provide VA with more immediate charging capacity. VA will use a similar approach to develop charging solutions at its non-medical facilities and will collaborate with the General Services Administration (GSA) to support leased facilities. Simultaneously, VA is replacing its petroleum-fueled vehicles with ZEVs using GSA’s annual vehicle lease replacement process, while global supply constraints are limiting GSA’s ability to support the full demand from VA and other agencies.

A few examples of the specific actions geared toward VA priorities include being provided 507 ZEVs by GSA in the FY 2022 vehicle lease replacement cycle; initiating feasibility studies to evaluate charging infrastructure solutions at each of the VA medical centers (VAMC), with GSA

contractual support; and installing dual-port solar EVSE at 34 VAMCs identified as using solar intensity mapping to provide more immediate charging capacity.

C. Net-Zero Emissions Buildings, Campuses and Installations

Achieving a net-zero emissions buildings portfolio by 2045 will require entirely new approaches to how VA designs, builds, constructs, operates and maintains its buildings. As such, VA will update agency policies in multiple program areas. VA will take an all-of-the-above approach by revising design standards to achieve net-zero emissions in new construction; accelerating efforts to increase energy and water efficiency; decarbonizing infrastructure where technically and financially viable; and improving the intelligence of VA buildings to allow for maximum operational efficiency. VA will accomplish these efforts through a combination of direct-funded projects, energy performance contracts, deep energy retrofits and changes to building operations. Specific examples of these efforts are as follows:

i. Design and Construction for Net-Zero Emissions

- VA is updating its guidance and standards for design and construction to include the requirements of EO 14057 and M-22-06.
- VA has launched an initiative called Standardized, Modular, Adaptable, and Rapid Template for Central Utility Plants which will evaluate state-of-the-art technologies for central utility plant systems that lower emissions and increase efficiency, for consideration and inclusion in future VA specifications and projects.

ii. Increasing Energy Efficiency

- VA is updating its Department-level energy management policies to reflect the requirements of the Energy Act of 2020, revised American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers 90.1 requirements for new construction and EO 14057 and M-22-06.
- In August 2021, VA issued interim guidance on the Energy Act of 2020 to help inform VA facility staff of the new requirements and initiate planning. VA's guidance established interim processes to support meeting the new legislative mandates, particularly those involving the implementation of energy and water conservation measures using energy performance contracts and direct-funded projects.

iii. Increasing Water Efficiency

- Similar to its approach to energy efficiency, VA will update its Department-level water management policies while continuing to pursue water efficiency measures within direct-funded and energy performance contracts.

D. Reducing Waste and Pollution

VA policy is to reduce, reuse and recycle materials and waste and to maintain life-cycle cost-effective waste prevention and recycling programs to the maximum extent practicable. Improving waste tracking capability, training and outreach are key VA strategies to promote performance in this area. Reduced export markets for recycled materials have made recycling more difficult and expensive, depending on location and material. Consequently, maintaining cost-effective recycling programs is challenging, as recycling can cost more than disposal in some cases. VA's health care environment also presents unique challenges for waste reduction that have become more complex during the Coronavirus of 2019 pandemic. Despite these difficulties, VA is taking a number of priority actions in FY 2022 to promote waste reduction. For example:

- All VAMCs, which manage the vast majority of the Department's waste, use a waste tracking system to help with data collection and reporting. In FY 2022, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) made improvements to that tool.

- VA began updating its waste policy to incorporate the diversion goals of EO 14057.
- VA notified its environmental professionals of the 2022 Federal Environmental Symposium and had 70 VA participants. Sessions included waste management and recycling-related training. VHA provided training to key staff on the waste tracking system and anticipates providing additional training on regulated medical waste and other waste topics in FY 2022.

E. Sustainable Procurement

VA policy is to procure sustainable goods and services, while training and outreach are key strategies to promote performance in this area. The Department is taking a number of priority actions in FY 2022 to promote sustainable procurement. These actions include the following:

- VA collected data on the Department's prior year acquisition of electronics. In FY 2021, 100% of VA's purchased personal computers and displays, imaging equipment and televisions met the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) standard. Buying EPEAT yields a variety of environmental, energy and climate-related benefits.
- In FY 2022, VA provided sustainable acquisition training to staff within the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, thus empowering its purchasers with information needed to comply with EO 14057 and statutory sustainable acquisition requirements.
- VA expects to purchase over 100 ENERGY STAR certified solar EVSEs for VA's ZEV fleet in accordance with EO 14057 and statutory requirements.

F. Climate- and Sustainability-Focused Federal Workforce

VA aims to enhance climate and sustainability literacy across the Department using multiple approaches that target specific audiences within the agency. The climate literacy campaign includes outreach to senior management, engagement with employees in specific professions relevant to climate adaptation and resiliency efforts and VA employees at-large. Specific examples of engagement efforts are as follows:

- VA is preparing an on-demand online training to provide a basic level of knowledge for all employees on climate science, the impacts of climate change on VA operations and VA's efforts to mitigate or adapt to those climate risks. The training will be available and accessible on VA's internal talent management system starting in FY 2023.
- For employees at-large, completed outreach efforts include an email to all employees from VA Deputy Secretary Donald Remy introducing the Federal Sustainability Plan; promotion of the Council on Environmental Quality's Sustainability Speaker Series; and the creation of an internal climate adaptation SharePoint site to share relevant resource materials.
- VA has created a multi-year communications plan for employee engagement that will involve senior executives as well as professionals in various fields, including engineering, capital planning and climate adaptation-focused acquisition.

G. Incorporating Environmental Justice

VA integrates environmental justice (EJ) into its mission by identifying and addressing programs, policies and activities with the potential for disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or income. Specific EJ programs, policies and activities include the following:

- In May 2022, VA updated [Directive 0065](#), “Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Planning,” to include responsibilities for senior VA officials to identify existing or new mitigation strategies or programs to address the impacts of highest concern to VA operations and facilities, including mitigation strategies that also advance EJ.
- By the end of calendar year 2022, VA expects to complete a nationwide climate vulnerability assessment of its critical facilities, including all VAMCs. VA’s evaluation will include information on community demographics, Veterans’ demographics, and Veterans’ reliance on the VA facility. This additional data will provide insight into the impact of climate vulnerabilities on EJ communities as VA decision-makers prioritize facility-level mitigation and resilience solutions.
- As part of the [Justice40 Initiative](#) to deliver at least 40% of the overall benefits from certain Federal investments to disadvantaged communities, VA identified a program within the Veterans Benefits Administration that provides clean energy/energy efficiency home loan benefits to disadvantaged Veterans and is working to expand this program, where feasible.

H. Accelerating Progress through Partnerships

VA engages in partnerships with public, private and non-profit sectors, labor unions and worker organizations. Federal inter-governmental partnerships leverage the experience and expertise of different agencies to inform VA policy and actions. Examples of these partnerships include the following:

- VA collaborated with over 30 partners to include the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Environmental Protection Agency, GSA and Kaiser Permanente as part of a Healthy Buildings Initiative in which the Bedford, Massachusetts VAMC participated in an indoor air quality study to identify opportunities to enhance occupant health and productivity.
- VA is participating in DOE’s Smart Building Accelerator Program to identify opportunities that enhance site interoperability with the electric grid and leverage validated technologies and practices. Through this partnership, VA will gain valuable insight into designing and operating its buildings to be more efficient and resilient.
- VA established new relationships with health care colleagues overseas by presenting highlights of sustainability within VA to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s health policy division, allowing for future dialogues and sharing of best practices on health care sustainability and measurement efforts.

3. Progress Examples

Increases in Renewable Electricity Consumption

Through electric commodity contracts in partnership with GSA, VA has increased the percentage of renewable energy it consumes. Since the signing of EO 14057, eight VA facilities have increased the renewable percentage of their electric contracts resulting in an additional 121,642 megawatt hours of renewable consumption annually.

Net-Zero Emission Buildings - VHA’s National Anesthesia Program

The Jesse Brown VAMC is piloting the use of Waste Anesthetic Gas Recovery and received the annual [Climate and Health Innovation Award](#) sponsored by Health Care Without Harm in acknowledgement of its use of the groundbreaking technology. Inhalational anesthetics are known greenhouse gases with global warming potential thousands of times more than carbon dioxide

(CO2). This pilot will add devices on current anesthesia machines to capture and assess the volume of diverted CO2 and inhalational anesthetics and prevent the release of anesthetic agents into the atmosphere. The captured inhalational anesthetics will be cleaned and recycled for further anesthetic use. The knowledge gained will be shared throughout VHA.

Waste Diversion Study

VA conducted a pilot waste diversion study at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VAMC and shared McGuire's opportunities for improvement with other VAMCs. Opportunities included increasing locations and the number of recycling bins where waste can be collected and segregated, improving management of waste contracts as well as documentation and reporting by contractors, improving tracking and reporting of waste data by including additional materials being recycled, establishing a realistic waste diversion goal tailored to the facility and based on the regional recycling market and exploring replication of the study at additional facilities located in different regions of the country.

ZEV Acquisition

In FY 2022, VA conducted multiple trainings for fleet managers to discuss VA's commitment to ZEVs and promote ZEV selections wherever feasible. Consequently, VA had a tremendous demand for ZEV conversions. Although global supply constraints continue to fall short of VA's demand for ZEVs, VA has confirmed 507 ZEV orders to date. With these orders, ZEVs make up 34% of VA's light-duty vehicle acquisitions in FY 2022.

Award-Winning Sustainable Health Care Activities

Twenty-three VAMCs were recognized by Practice Greenhealth for Sustainable Activities in Health Care. VHA received [26 awards](#) covering 10 areas of sustainable practice, including: Chemicals, Climate, Energy, Environmentally Preferred Purchasing, Greening the Operating Room, Green Building, Leadership, Transportation, Waste and Water.

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