

# TRANSFORMING BLUE WRAP FROM WASTE INTO USEABLE PRODUCTS

Gundersen Health System has made strides to keep blue wrap out of the waste stream by investing in reusable hard cases for surgical instrument trays. While these cases have reduced the amount of blue wrap used to keep surgical trays sterile, they are not an option for every instrument. Now, when Gundersen needs to wrap trays in blue wrap, they've found a way to reuse it thanks to a unique partnership between Gundersen and a local volunteer program called the Coulee Region Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

Blue wrap is removed from the ORs before a patient is brought in for a procedure, so it remains sterile. Gundersen knew there had to be ways to reuse it and considered working with a vendor to create tote bags, but the option was not financially or environmentally sound. Then, they connected with Coulee Region RSVP—a volunteer program for people age 55 and up that has a long-standing relationship with Gundersen.

Volunteers from Coulee Region RSVP's handcrafts program created patterns to turn the discarded blue wrap into usable items. The volunteers sew the blue wrap into items such as tote bags, aprons for adult and pediatric cancer patients to use as they do crafts during chemo treatments, craft bags to hold supplies, small cinch bags to hold personal items for Gundersen hospital patients, and wheelchair and walker bags used in the therapy departments.

The program kicked off in late summer 2011 and has grown steadily. In 2014, 20 Coulee Region RSVP volunteers transformed more than 400 pounds of blue wrap into more than 600 items being used at Gundersen. Because of the large amount of blue wrap waste that is generated in the ORs, not all of it can be used by Coulee Region RSVP. Gundersen also developed a blue wrap recycling program. In all, Gundersen recycled and reused more than 9,400 pounds of blue wrap in 2014.

Gundersen and Coulee Region RSVP say the program is a win-win. It keeps materials out of the waste stream by finding a new use for them, engages more volunteers to become involved in the community and meets a number of needs for Gundersen.

The blue wrap project is just one piece of Gundersen's extensive plan to lead the healthcare industry in environmental stewardship through their Envision® program. Gundersen Health System is headquartered in La Crosse, Wis., with hospitals and clinics in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa. For more information:

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