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Muskegon County Triumphs at Energy Efficiency

By USGBC West MI Chapter (<http://www.michiganbattleofthebuildings.org/author/usgbc-wm/>) | March 24, 2017



(<https://i0.wp.com/www.michiganbattleofthebuildings.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/hdmate044-1-e1490375553752.jpg>)

Sustainability is a necessity, not a choice, for public and government buildings to be good stewards with community tax dollars. Today, Muskegon County (<http://www.co.muskegon.mi.us/>) takes this responsibility very seriously through the sustainable foundation that began more than 20 years ago.

Each year, Muskegon County enters the Michigan Battle of the Buildings (<http://www.michiganbattleofthebuildings.org/>) competition. The Michigan Battle of the Buildings is an awards and recognition program for energy use reduction open to all Michigan area commercial, industrial & multi-family buildings. At the end of the year, numbers are crunched and the "Biggest Losers" are crowned.

Muskegon County's Department of Public Works looks for ways to reduce energy usage in all of their facilities. The County staff finds it critical in older facilities that weren't originally constructed with sustainability in mind. Therefore, Muskegon County was pleased to be named a 'Biggest Loser' for its Louis A. McMurray Conference & Transportation Center (<http://matsbus.com/>) two years in a row. The Center, built in 2000, underwent retrofitting in 2015 that resulted in an overall 10.4 percent energy reduction.



(https://i1.wp.com/www.michiganbattleofthebuildings.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/healthwest_grass_92015.jpg)

The Louis A. McMurray Conference & Transportation Center is not Muskegon County's only energy reduction success. Muskegon County's HealthWest (<http://healthwest.net/>) building took 1st place in the 2015 competition with a 4.25 percent reduction.

Muskegon County's energy conservation measures include reducing plug loads by switching to more efficient computers and monitors. Plug loads are significant factors in energy consumption, especially in an office building. Plug loads include equipment that gets "plugged in" to electrical receptacles. Plug load energy consumption can be reduced by evaluating equipment efficiency and usage and by being conscious of when energy is being unnecessarily consumed.

Energy monitoring, the energy reduction plan, and a look towards renewables are all in place due in great part to the County's commitment to sustainability and the addition of a Sustainability Coordinator position in 2011. This position was initially created to focus on County recycling efforts but quickly expanded to include energy and carbon reduction. Sara Damm has held this position for four years and has attended the Michigan Battle of the Buildings Energy Summit (<http://www.michiganbattleofthebuildings.org/2017-energy-summit/>) each year.

"We're glad to be saving taxpayers money," said Damm. "We are also happy about reducing energy consumption and reducing carbon emissions."

Damm offers advice for facility managers to start with benchmarking energy usage through EPA's ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager (<https://www.energystar.gov/buildings/facility-owners-and-managers/existing-buildings/use-portfolio-manager>). "You can't manage what you don't measure." She went on to suggest reviewing facility lighting and replacing incandescent and CFL lamps with LEDs.

The County's success will continue through the wide, continued commitment from the staff, constituents, tax payers, and elected officials alike. The energy plan is providing measurable results in usage, savings, and reduction goals. Muskegon County launched a new sustainability website (<http://www.sustainablemuskegon.org/index.php>) to share the results and stay accountable to the public.

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