The Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) and Same Day Surgery (SDS) departments each have their own Unit Based shared governance Councils (UBC) comprised of staff nurses and unit leaders. The UBCs decided to look for opportunities to decrease costs and impact on the environment. Paper usage and proper disposal of waste were identified as two key areas.

Paper usage: EKG “strips” are printed out at a central location in the PACU. Nurses were educated in ways to adjust the settings on their monitors so that unnecessary strips were not generated. In SDS, the post-operative telephone call log was created to prevent the need to print out an additional set of discharge instructions for the nurse to reference. Compared to previous years approximately 30 boxes of paper were saved.

Proper waste disposal: Disposal of waste in hazardous material bags costs the organization $900 per ton, as compared to $52 for solid waste. Our units were arranged such that the hazardous material bins were the most accessible bins for disposal. The UBC rearranged the bins and educated nurses that only material saturated in blood should be disposed in the red bins. This led to a dramatic decrease in the amount of waste sent to the inappropriate area.

Nurses can identify even simple changes in front line practice that can benefit the organization through reduced cost and the environment through reduced waste. In the future, our units will be looking at reducing energy usage to increase our sustainability.