

# The New York Times

May 14, 2009, 5:06 pm

## Hospitals Vow to Curb Carbon Emissions

*By A. G. Sulzberger*

Hospitals use a lot of power. The lights in emergency rooms burn around the clock. Outlets in the laboratories are taxed by computers, refrigerators and high-tech medical equipment. The air must be kept fresh and frosty to prevent the spread of germs, leaving air-conditioning and ventilation units on permanent overdrive.

All together, New York City hospitals are responsible for about 1.5 percent of the city's total greenhouse gas emissions, city officials say, pumping them out at more than double the rate for a commercial office building. Energy is the second only to salaries in cost for hospitals, according to the [Greater New York Hospital Association](#).

On Thursday, representatives from about 13 hospital systems with 35 hospitals in the city pledged to reduce that carbon footprint, cutting their share of greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent over the next 10 years. In doing so they join [Broadway theaters](#) and [city universities](#) on a growing list of local institutions assisting the city in meeting its greenhouse gas reduction targets.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has been lobbying city institutions to agree to the reduction in greenhouse gases by the more ambitious 10-year deadline of 2017 being used for government operations, rather than the citywide 2030 deadline laid out in [PlaNYC](#), the 127-point vision for an environmentally friendly New York.

For the hospitals that signed up, the move means finding ways to significantly cut back on energy use and move to greener sources of energy, beyond merely switching to low energy fluorescent light bulbs.

New York-Presbyterian, for example, is installing natural generators at facilities that can be used to produce both electricity and heating, and exploring options for buying the remainder of the electricity from greener sources, like wind farms.

“It has to be a multifaceted full-court press,” said Graeme Mitchell, a vice president in charge of facilities at New York-Presbyterian, which spends \$70 million a year on electricity and fuel costs.

Stephen Monez, an assistant vice president with Continuum Health Partners — which includes Beth Israel Medical Center, Roosevelt Hospital, St. Luke’s Hospital and the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary — said that the projects aimed at reducing the carbon footprint would pay for themselves within 10 years and save about \$4.6 million a year afterward.

While a majority of hospitals in New York City signed up, many declined saying that the short-term cost was too great, even with the prospect of savings down the road.

“It is resource intensive and some facilities are struggling with the current fiscal situation,” said Alison Burke, an associate vice president with the Greater New York Hospital Association. “They would all love to do it.”