



In its wooded setting in Chicago's lakefront Lincoln Park, the not-for-profit Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum helps urban dwellers connect to the natural world through scientific learning and environmental programs. Visitors experience beautiful wildflowers, exotic butterflies year-round, an indoor wilderness walk, fun ways to nurture nature and other environmental exhibits. Staff bring outreach education programs to Illinois public schools, hosting science workshops for teachers and offering lectures, field trips, weekend workshops and other special programs for children and adults.

The museum is also a workplace and employer with a staff of 80 and more than 130 volunteers. So -- as any employer can -- the museum decided that Clean Air Counts. Two major initiatives help clean our air:

Workplace Transportation

The museum staff organized a "Green Team" of employees who volunteer to leave automobiles at home and get to work by bicycle, ride-sharing and public transportation. The museum staff participates in the annual citywide Chicago Bike Month and recently placed third in the Chicagoland Bicycle Federations's Bicycle Commuter Challenge. Fully 75 percent of the staff has a personal plan-of-action for ozone action days when weather and smog conditions create the greatest need to lower emissions.

The museum's alternate transportation strategy is supported by neighboring businesses who donate prizes for employees who have the greenest transportation habits. Prizes range from dinners to bike accessories to smoothies.

Landscaping

The museum has conducted educational programming for homeowners who want to learn about how to reduce pollution through natural landscaping, minimizing the use of lawnmowers and other landscaping equipment that emit pollution. The museum is committed to practicing what they preach. In addition to converting much of the surrounding grounds to natural landscaping, it built a 17,000 square foot rooftop garden with over 200 species of drought-tolerant plants, including sedum (a perennial succulent) and prickly pear cactus, native to Illinois. Rooftop gardens help reduce the urban heat island effect that makes urban areas six to eight degrees warmer than surrounding areas. They also decrease rainwater runoff and keep the rooftop cooler, reducing energy bills by up to 25 percent.

The only remaining portion of its rooftop that isn't planted features solar panels that reduced the Museum's electricity costs and thereby reduced emissions from electricity generating power plants.

"We have always hoped that our building would be a physical manifestation of our mission -- an homage to our natural environment," said Stephen Bell, director of museum operations. "In this spirit, we have begun an extensive building greening project that will convey, in powerful and beautiful ways, the importance of preserving our environment."