

University of Wisconsin Sustainable Management Alumnus Helps American Family Insurance Work toward a Zero Waste Future

MADISON, Wis. (May 14, 2013) – Maggie Layden is changing the world one vegetable peel at a time. Maggie is the project leader for the American Family Insurance initiative, “Our Dream of a Zero Waste Future.” By diverting the corporate cafeteria’s pre-consumer food waste from landfills, she is helping the Fortune 500 insurance company move closer to its goal of a zero waste future. A 2012 alumnus, Maggie credits the University of Wisconsin [online Sustainable Management degree](#) for her success today.

With a strong focus on the intersections between people, planet, and profit, the online UW Sustainable Management degree offers a curriculum designed to provide foundational knowledge for making changes in the workplace. Students learn to take a systems approach to solutions, analyzing whole systems in order to create lasting change.

“I think about my University of Wisconsin Systems Thinking course every single day. It was a really difficult course, but it applies to everything I do at American Family,” says Maggie. “Plus if the degree were not online, I could never have worked on an internship here, a position that ultimately evolved into a full-time career.”

Already a leader in sustainability, American Family has made significant strides to drastically reduce its water usage by 20 percent. The company is on track to reduce its energy use by 15 percent by 2016.

Originally designed to meet a course requirement, the zero waste project grew out of a desire to recycle organic waste. According to Maggie’s supervisor Dan Rosetta, facility operations director, “it wasn’t long before we realized that in addition to adding organics recycling, we needed to revisit the existing recycling program at American Family.”

With the goal to divert at least 90 percent of its waste from landfills, American Family hired Maggie to lead a ten-person team that includes colleagues, the company’s housekeeping services, and food vendor. The team established a process for sorting pre-consumer food waste from food prep in the kitchen so it can be composted under controlled conditions. If the waste is uncontaminated, it can be recycled and not sent to landfills.

(more)

The high-visibility project is a public-private partnership with the city of Madison. The first step was to collect organics to be audited by the city of Madison. The city looked for non-organic contamination in the sample. While there was some contamination found in the initial sample, it was well within the city's acceptable limit. American Family was given the approval to officially begin diverting pre-consumer waste to the city's pilot program.

Next, Maggie and the team introduced the Zero Waste pilot to American Family's senior leadership forum. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, when everyone from the CEO to directors completed a survey, many suggested even more ways to reduce waste across the company.

In the pursuit of her education goals, Maggie reached her career goals. "I consider earning my degree online through UW one of the best decisions I've ever made. I am passionate about my job – I get to calculate the company's carbon footprint, water usage and waste reduction," she says. "I truly believe I'm making a difference."

More information on this program can found online at sustain.wisconsin.edu or by phone at 877-UW-LEARN (877-895-3276).

About the University of Wisconsin Sustainable Management Program

The University of Wisconsin Sustainable Management bachelor's degree is the first online degree of its kind. The UW-Extension has brought together the strengths of four different University of Wisconsin campuses—UW-Parkside, UW-River Falls, UW-Stout and UW-Superior—to craft a degree completion program that equips adult workers with the management skills they need to lead sustainable business initiatives.

#