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Ohio U Students Take Conservation Challenge

Students are striving to conserve water and energy for Ohio University's Residence Challenge, a voluntary initiative which kicked off on Sunday, January 20. The competition is open to students living in all of the university's residence halls and encourages them to conserve with an incentive: a trip to Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, OH, on May 11.

The challenge started some five years ago, says Sonia Marcus, sustainability coordinator at Ohio University in Athens, OH. At the start of the competition, each residence hall is given a "baseline" or average energy/water usage based on the data from the previous three years. The competition, which ends on March 8, pits the residence halls against one another as they try to lower their consumption below the baseline by the largest margin. A hall from each green will be declared a winner.

Last year, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that were avoided due to energy conservation efforts totaled 106.6 tons, which Marcus estimates is equivalent to taking 6,250 cars off the road for an entire day. "We keep ratcheting up the standards every year," she says. "Every year they use less energy and water; it keeps making it more difficult to show gains."

"Last year, 210 students went on the Cedar Point trip," continues Marcus. "It works as an incentive because students know every bit of their personal effort counts."

Each winning hall selects the top participating students for the trip. The more energy and water saved, the more students who can qualify to go.

"The residence halls find creative ways to conserve as much as possible," says Marcus. Students reported to her that they created the "Power Shower Relay Races," and some overzealous residents even posted "out of order" signs on water fountains to save on water usage. "Not that I encourage that," she says laughing.

The Office of Sustainability also reminds students to turn off the lights when they don't need them. Last year, the university sponsored a program that switched incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescents.

Highlights of the challenge this year include:

- * New cardboard trophies that will sit in the lobby of the leading residence halls as the competition goes on:
- * The return of preprinted post-it notes that RAs can stick on

the return of prepared post-it notes that are scattered on their residents' doors if they see utilities left on: and
* Shower hangers reminding students to shower in eight minutes or less (and this year, they're printed on recyclable materials, notes Marcus).

While the contest only lasts roughly seven weeks, Marcus hopes the message of conservation will resonate with students for much longer. "My goal is for students to feel a sense of empowerment about issues like climate change," she says. "I think there are a lot of students who are concerned about these issues but think they're too big or amorphous so they chose not to take part. You should develop good habits because they're just as hard to break as bad ones."

More information about the Residence Challenge at Ohio University can be obtained at:
www.facilities.ohiou.edu/conservation/ResidenceChallenge2008.htm

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