

# OU must apply for OEPA permit to complete composting project

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Ohio University is banking on an approximately \$375,000 composting machine to stem the “excessive amount of solid waste” that Baker University Center currently generates, an Ohio University official said.

The amount of waste produced at West 82 combined with limited dumpster space has forced trash collectors to make two trips to Baker each day.

The \$75,300 per year it costs to empty the dumpster outside Baker twice a day has overridden any benefits from the biodegradable plates and silverware, said Edward Newman, Recycling and Refuse manager.

“It’s not like it’s going to be a liability on us for the rest of our lives,” he said. “It started out as a negative, but it’ll end up as a tremendous positive.”

Officials believed the installation of a composting unit would take a large step toward minimizing waste buildup and dumpster costs.

OU purchased the Wright Environmental Management’s In-Vessel Composting System in late January. The system is a tube-like machine that can hold up to two tons of compost per day, said Sonia Marcus, sustainability coordinator.

The compost machine, which is expected to arrive over the summer, will hold food, biodegradable service ware, woodchips and other organic matter OU employees will collect from across campus, Newman said. When the compost exits the end of the vessel 14 days later, it will be in a soil-like state and will be screened for trash and clumps that might have ended up in the mix.

After university employees sift through the compost, it will be distributed as a “soil amendment” around the golf course, university turf, The Ridges, landscaping areas and possibly the botany gardens, Newman said.

To install the In-Vessel System, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency must approve registration, a license and financial assurance, said Joe Goicochea, environmental specialist with the OPEA.

Although OU hasn’t applied for the permit yet, Goicochea said the procedure is fairly easy and takes a few weeks to complete. The local OEPA district office must then approve the proposed location and inspect the facility quarterly once it is installed, he said.

The best location so far is a flat section of The Ridges away from the Hocking River, the watershed and people’s homes, Newman said.

Last spring, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources awarded OU a \$250,000 grant to go toward the university’s composting efforts. The grant will run until June 30, requiring OU to complete the project in a year.

Larry Cooper, recycling programs coordinator at ODNR’s Division of Recycling and Litter Prevention, called the scope of OU’s food waste minimization endeavors “significant” and “innovative.” He said it has one of the largest composting units among colleges in the country.

“OU really is a school that I use as a model when I talk to other schools around the state about recycling and composting,” he said.

Marcus said the unit would be fully functional Fall Quarter 2008. In addition to West 82, food waste will be collected from Latitude 39, The Front Room and the dining halls.

“Everything we can make a change with we will make a change with,” she said.