

Students flip switch for energy savings

March 20, 2008

Picture 3,622,240 standard lightbulbs. Know how much electricity they consume in an hour? 272 megawatts. Now erase that. This year, that's what students on the Ohio University Athens campus did by conserving energy as part of the Office of Sustainability's Residence Challenge, according to a press release.

During the seven-week competition that ended March 8, the 40 OU residence halls conserved the equivalent of nearly 300 tons of greenhouse-gas emissions. In addition to what they did for the environment, participating students saved the university more than \$12,000. The electricity reduction was triple what was conserved last year, according to OU Sustainability Coordinator Sonia Marcus.

Throughout the competition, Marcus' office and students found creative ways to encourage participation and get the word out, according to the release.

The office of sustainability introduced a new initiative, "Green Crib Certification," halfway through the competition. To earn the honor of being "certified," students completed an energy audit of their room and vowed to commit to one "conservation action."

"It (was) a way of obviously engaging students in the Residence Challenge," Marcus said in the release, "but also making it clear to people in the residence halls that they have friends and peers who are actually committing to conservation-related behaviors."

Students also took initiatives of their own to encourage residents to consume less. Wray House Resident Director Wendy Rogers said she noticed that some mods were looking "particularly lived in." When she expressed concern, residents explained that they were making more use of the common living space at night so lights could be turned off in individual rooms.

Tiffin Hall resident adviser Darryl Baker, whose residence hall won East Green honors in the competition, organized a "Save Rave," inviting residents to turn off electricity in their rooms and come to the lobby for a dance party, complete with glow sticks and a battery-operated CD player.

Marcus said the short-term goals for the competition, which began in 2001, are directly related to the Presidents Climate Commitment.

"As part of the PCC, we have made a pledge to develop a comprehensive climate strategy and select a date by which we believe we can become climate neutral," Marcus said in the release. "The best way for us to move toward that goal is to cut down on the amount of energy we need to run this campus."

In the long-term, Marcus said she hopes students picked up tips during the competition that will become lifelong habits.

"I believe that as we enable students to make the important connections between energy use and climate change, they will choose to live more sustainably," she said in the release.