

OU tries to make students more energy conscious

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As energy efficiency remains a hot topic on the current environmental and political agenda, Ohio University is getting students involved in the effort.

Sonia Marcus, OU's sustainability coordinator, said the university is trying to get students to change their behavior to be more energy conservative through educational competitions such as the ResChallenge. The seven-week energy conservation competition between participating residence halls on each green tracks each residence hall's weekly energy consumption.

In the past, the competition also included water consumption, but the Office of Sustainability cannot monitor water consumption this year because several campus water meters are not working.

Water meters at Scott Quad, Martzloff House and Jefferson Hall are currently out of operation. Ron Chapman, director of energy management, said the university has notified the city of Athens about the dysfunctional meters and are waiting for them to be fixed.

Athens Water Maintenance Supervisor Nick Joseph was unavailable for comment at press time.

Water bills for the residence halls are being calculated based on past water usage, Chapman said.

"They are able to estimate with some reasonability based on previous water bills," Chapman said, adding that in a city such as Athens with many utilities, it's not uncommon for several utilities to need attention at any given time.

"Even though water isn't being counted as part of the competition, we are still reading the working meters ... and still trying to encourage students to conserve water," Chapman said.

Marcus explained OU's energy consumption is determined by a variety of factors, such as the amount of utilities in use per building, how long each utility is in use and the square footage of each building.

"It's tough to say how much progress is going on because energy conservation goes hand in hand with how people use the buildings," Marcus said.

With new technology creating a larger demand for energy, students are consuming more energy on average than in previous years.

"More students are bringing more electrical-dependent things per room," Marcus said. "Students today have a different culture of consumption."

According to Ohio University's Performance Contract last updated in February 2007, the university has spent a total of \$8,986,058 over the last five years in energy conserving infrastructure projects with a total cost savings of \$7,055,617 as a result of these projects.

"We may not have made a considerable monetary savings, but imagine what our energy expenditures would be like had we not completed the conservation projects," Marcus said.

Conservation projects such as the ResChallenge have been successful in both conserving energy and educating students about the need to conserve.

Residents from the hall that saves the most will win an all expenses paid trip to Cedar Point on May 11. At the end of the sixth week of competition on March 1, Tiffin Hall held the lead on East Green, Frenzel House was No. 1 on South Green and James Hall was the frontrunner on West Green.

Harry Wyatt, executive director of Facilities Management, said the amount of energy savings during the competition thus far is clearly higher than the savings last year.

"I'm very proud of the way students are reacting," he said.