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Ohio University
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Tuesday, April 15, 2008

Earth Week 08: Behind the scenes

One in a series of stories for Earth Week, April 12-22, 2008

Apr 14, 2008

By Sonia Marcus

Earth Week is now celebrating its second annual installment at Ohio University, and with it comes my second annual feeling of unease about the risks inherent in designating one brief portion of the year as worthy of Earth appreciation. We all know we cannot limit our commitment to sustainability to a 10-day observance.

Yet, I recognize the importance of centering our community's efforts and attention from time to time. And so I urge you to dig into this year's topic, which emphasizes the social justice dimensions of sustainability. We will investigate environmental racism and injustice: the roots, the symptoms, the consequences and, most importantly, the solutions.

Here's an inside look at the topic, the people and the programs that will bring this annual series to life as we lead up to the April 22 observance of Earth Day.

The topic

The term environmental justice refers to the movement that attempts to bring attention to the disproportionate environmental burdens faced by communities of color and poor regions around the world. The movement gained momentum in the 1990s as American environmentalists came to recognize a critical need to address issues of race, class and social injustice as part of their campaigns.

Researchers began to document links between low-income or politically disadvantaged communities and environmental ills brought on by industrialization, energy dependence, natural disasters, hazardous waste disposal and natural resource extraction. Two of our own faculty, Director of Environmental Studies Michele Morrone and Associate Professor of Geography Geoff Buckley, investigate environmental justice issues specific to the Appalachian Ohio region.

In early planning meetings for Earth Week 08, we agreed that the topic would be well-suited to our program, allowing us to focus attention on local, regional, national and international struggles for social justice and sustainability, many of which are highly relevant to our own communities and environment here in Southeast Ohio,

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Photo courtesy of Sonia Marcus

Earth Week tip from the Office of Sustainability

Throughout Earth Week, the Office of Sustainability will provide daily suggestions for incorporating hassle-free, environment-friendly actions into your regular routine. Today's tip:

Calculate your ecological footprint:

The average American lifestyle requires substantial resources -- water, fuel, food, wood and more. Redefining Progress' recently updated Ecological Footprint Quiz allows you to calculate how many planet Earths it would take to extend your lifestyle to every human being in the world today. Take 10 minutes out of your

the heart of coal country.

The people

As the coordinator of Ohio University's Office of Sustainability, I have the great pleasure of collaborating with students, faculty and staff who are dedicated both personally and professionally to raising awareness of sustainability on campus. When asked to suggest speakers for the week, many individuals agreed that authors Jeff Goodell and Erik Reece would be ideal. Both have received national attention for their accounts of the impact the coal industry has had on the Appalachian region.

Don't miss their evening public presentations: Reece speaks at 8 p.m. today in Walter Hall 145, while Goodell's presentation is at 7 p.m. Wednesday in Scripps Auditorium. More on their presentations can be found on the [schedule of Earth Week 08 activities](#).

The two guests also will be enriching students' classroom experiences. Bernhard Debatin, associate professor in the Scripps School of Journalism, was instrumental in bringing our guests to campus as well as coordinating opportunities for them in the classroom. Reece will attend Jack Wright's Film in Appalachia class, Mary Abowd's magazine feature writing class and Buckley's Appalachia class, while Goodell will visit Steve Siff's computer-assisted journalism class.

On Thursday evening, a panel of grassroots environmental justice activists will discuss the legal and policy dimensions of these struggles. The discussion will provide the opportunity to learn about the struggles of communities facing severe pollution as well as a new environmental justice policy being drafted for the state of Ohio.

The programs

Thirty individuals have signed on for Friday's OHIO Cycle of Coal Tour. A first for Ohio University, it will offer an inside look at the means by which our campus sources, processes, burns and monitors its coal-fired Lausche Heating Plant. As Ohio University takes steps to assess and address its carbon footprint through the Presidents Climate Commitment, the tour will offer an opportunity to gain a more intimate understanding of our institution's coal dependence.

Although the tour is already at capacity, there are plenty of other options if you're looking for alternatives to lectures and presentations. You might consider participating in the Athens Spring Ride organized by the Athens Bicycle Club, visiting the Conveniently Green Market planned by the Sierra Student Coalition or attend a DIY Dorm Compost Workshop co-sponsored by Residence Life.

Visit the [Office of Sustainability](#) on the Web for a full lineup of Earth Week 08 activities.

busy schedule to see how your home and habits stack up to those of your fellow Americans.

[Take the quiz](#)

Plan now for Earth Day, April 22, when Ohio University employees and students are being asked to walk, bike or carpool to work.

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