

# Open forum draws attention to OU's climate commitment policy

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Ohio University's Ecology and Energy Conservation Committee sponsored an open forum last Thursday to discuss the university's continuing implementation of guidelines in the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment.

The document, signed last May by OU President Roderick McDavis, is a national initiative with 515 signatories from higher-education institutions across the country. The long-term goal of the commitment is complete climate neutrality of the signing campus, a target date for which must be set within two years of signing. Within one year of signing, the campus is required to undertake a "comprehensive inventory of all greenhouse-gas emissions (including emissions from electricity, heating, commuting and air travel) and update the inventory every other year thereafter," according to the PCC's Web site. OU's inventory is slated to be finished in September.

Interim goals for climate neutrality must also be set, and climate neutrality and sustainability are to be integrated into the curriculum at each signatory college and university. All reports must also be released to the public to ensure transparency, said assistant professor Kim Brown, of the Department of Environmental and Plant Biology. The information must be given to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education for distribution.

The forum Thursday centered around the second section of the commitment: choosing two or more actions from a list of "tangible actions to reduce greenhouse gases while the more comprehensive plan is being developed."

The policy options are:

- Establish a policy that all new campus construction will be built to at least the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Silver standard or equivalent.
- Adopt an energy-efficient appliance-purchasing policy requiring purchase of ENERGY STAR-certified products in all areas for which such ratings exist.
- Establish a policy of offsetting all greenhouse-gas emissions generated by air travel paid for by our institution.
- Encourage use of and provide access to public transportation for all faculty, staff, students and visitors at our institution.
- Within one year of signing this document, begin purchasing or producing at least 15 percent of our institution's electricity consumption from renewable sources.
- Establish a policy or committee that supports climate and sustainability shareholder proposals at companies where our institution's endowment is invested.
- Participate in the Waste Minimization component of the national RecycleMania competition, and adopt three or more associated measures to reduce waste.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS EXPRESSED concern at the implications of some of the proposed programs. These reservations included concern about a lack of emphasis on alternative transportation as opposed to mass

transportation, and the real effect of the LEED standards and if they go far enough.

LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and is a type of checklist for both new building construction and renovation. Each construction decision falls in one of several areas, including Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy & Atmosphere, Materials & Resources and Indoor Environmental Quality. Organizations earn points in each category depending on the combination of options chosen, and then receive a rating based on the total. The maximum score is 69 and the Silver rating, the third tier of four, corresponds to a score of 33-38 points.

Sonia Marcus, sustainability coordinator in the university's Facilities and Auxiliaries Department, said that in many cases with renovations and new construction, it would be impossible to avoid net increases in energy use, even using more efficient technology.

When old buildings are renovated, they must then come into compliance with any building codes that have been passed since their construction, often mandating such things as increased ventilation or other changes to promote the health and safety of the occupants, she said. So even if the building uses less energy than it would have if traditional construction materials had been used, it still uses more energy than it did before the renovation. And while the LEED standard is a radical improvement, it "is nowhere near energy neutral," Marcus said.

Brown said that growth and efficiency may be competing forces, and while new buildings may use energy efficiently, their existence increases the overall energy consumption.

Money is also an issue. Constructing a new building (or renovating an old one) to an energy-efficient standard increases initial costs between 1 and 5 percent, Brown said. However, that money is recouped in lower operating costs over the life of the building.

Marcus said since the monies used to construct and operate campus buildings come from separate pools, it is difficult to get one contingent to spend more money when they won't directly receive the benefits, even though they are accumulated by all in the long run.