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Project offers landlords tips to save energy

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Ashley Lutz / Culture Senior Writer / al164906@ohiou.edu



Kristin Eberts / Picture Editor / ke277604@ohiou.edu

Matt Hartman, Ohio University graduate student and resident of the Ecohouse, describes the bio mass furnace that provides low cost heat for the house. The furnace runs off corn kernels, corn pellets and wood pellets. OU's new Green House Project will aim to spread awareness about energy efficiency and utility costs and cut down on off-campus housing energy use through more efficient heating practices and home insulation.

While many Ohio University students may not be ready to move into the Ecohouse to save energy, a new project promises to make many off-campus houses more eco-friendly without the big commitment.

The Office of Sustainability and the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development launched The Green House Project, which recommends home improvements that make houses more energy efficient, said Sonia Marcus, OU's sustainability coordinator.

Simple changes could offset damage to the environment and save students hundreds of dollars a year in utility bills, she said.

A \$50,000 grant from the Sugar Bush Foundation funds the project, which Marcus said is the first of its kind.

"Right now, we only have enough money for about 40 units, but if the model is successful, then we could look into getting more

funding,” she said.

Interested tenants or landlords go through an application process and, if selected, pay a one-time, \$75 audit fee.

Landlords who make any of the changes suggested in the audit could receive up to \$500 in reimbursements, Marcus said. The office also performs a final assessment to ensure the changes made were effective, she said.

Though local landlords might be hesitant to spend money on eco-friendly improvements, those properties might be more attractive to tenants seeking low energy bills, Marcus said.

The corporation will perform audits through a partnership with the university, said Tom Calhoun, assistant division director of the nonprofit Athens organization.

The corporation has audited more than 80,000 houses in local counties since 1971, Calhoun said, adding that the average household saves about \$400 in utilities per year.

The corporation usually works with low-income housing but still views the Green House Project as a way to give back to the community, he said.

“Reducing wasteful energy use is important now, especially because gas and electric rates are going up,” Calhoun said. “This isn’t going to go away.”

The Green House Project offers a practical way for students to increase energy efficiency, said Matt Hartman, an OU graduate student and Ecohouse resident.

While the Ecohouse has a \$20,000 solar panel, this luxury is unrealistic for the average person, Hartman said. Solar panels use energy from the sun to produce electricity.

The house was renovated in 2005 and also features a corn-burning furnace, a water-saving washer and dryer and a solar-powered water heater, he said.

“These things might not be accessible to everyone, but people can still conserve on an individual level through bringing down energy costs, he said.

The Green House Project emphasizes the idea that “energy conservation matters not only from an environmental standpoint, but also financially,” he said.

“This isn’t about shipping money off to wind-farms that claim to offset carbon emissions or slapping solar panels on your house,” Marcus said. “This is something that is accessible to students and has a tangible result.”

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