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## Take little, save more

**Students living at Ecohouse learn and teach how to be more environmentally efficient**

By Jackie Zimmermann, Staff Writer

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Julia Dose

Ecohouse resident Danny Young describes the process and use of compost while giving a tour.

Regardless of the national housing market, finding a house or apartment in Athens can be stressful. For prime housing, students have to start searching and start making payments almost a full year in advance.

While the majority of Ohio University students think prime housing refers to the distance from Court Street or from classes, a select few think beyond Saturday night and more toward the future.

The Ecohouse, a university-sponsored experiment in sustainable living, utilizes renewable energy opposed to other, more environmentally damaging sources. While for some the term “sustainable living” immediately conjures up images of living with the bare minimum and making extreme sacrifices, the three students living in the Ecohouse will attest to the comfortable and still convenient atmosphere created by using

environmentally friendly resources and ideas.

Matt Hartman, a graduate student in the outdoor recreation field, is one of the students chosen through an application process to live in the house, and he does not feel that he made any insufferable sacrifices. "It's a bit of a lifestyle change for some people," he said, "but the three of us had pretty much already committed to that change, so it's not a hardship."

With the help of more than \$60,000 in grants, the house is equipped with solar panels for electricity and hot water and an assortment of environmentally friendly appliances. The students living there utilize an electric teakettle, a small, energy-saving dishwasher and a washing machine that spins clothes into water instead of filling up with it. Along with using the right appliances, the students also make an effort to avoid those that use an unnecessary amount of energy.

For instance, instead of drying clothes in a dryer (which happens to be broken at the moment anyway), they line dry. Because the stove is a big waste of energy, they also make a point to cook as many things as they can at once. The house also has a corn-fuel heater. However, the corn was bought in bulk, and those involved with the Ecohouse feel that moisture seeping into the corn has led to some furnace problems they have been having lately. To help rectify the problem, wood pellets have been substituted for the corn.

Hartman and his roommates create both indoor and outdoor compost systems to help sustain a garden where they grow some of their own produce. By not purchasing their produce at Wal-Mart or Kroger, they are reaping both the health and energy-saving benefits associated with locally grown food. Even though simple things like paying close attention to energy usage while buying appliances or starting a garden can make a drastic difference on the environment, it still takes a consistent, conscious awareness to really make a change.

"I imagine folks that would hesitate haven't considered the energy use for long-distance food supply chains, seen a garbage dump with millions of recyclable items scattered about, the richness of compost or a coal-burning electricity plant," Hartman said. "When you reflect on that, the little extra time feels less and less like a hardship and more and more like healthy living."

While one of the Ecohouse's missions is to be as environmentally friendly as possible, another key goal for those involved is to educate their peers and community members about the ease and benefits of sustainable living. Hartman's own connection to nature is what helped him realize that dedication to the environment is "not just about taking care of the beautiful wild places" but that "it needs to begin with an environmental ethic that deals with our everyday living." By living in the Ecohouse, he can continue his own education while also helping others make positive changes in their lifestyles.

All three roommates have an active connection with nature. Kate Hammond is currently working on a master's degree in environmental studies, and Danny Young already has a degree in alternative energy systems and is working on a second undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. Their knowledge and appreciation of the environment makes them the perfect guides for the many curious visitors attending Ecohouse open-houses and pot-lucks. For them, living in the house and getting the word out is a great process that will be going through constant revision. That's the best thing about this project, Hartman said, there are some "neat things going on now, but there is lots of room for news ideas and making the project reach out to more people."

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