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Ready, set, conserve

Greens go "green" for annual Residence Challenge

Jan 22, 2008

By Jessica Alfrey

With freezing temperatures and snow falling in Athens during winter quarter, students may be looking for a fun activity to distract them from their study doldrums. What better and more effective game than a "Power Shower Relay Race"?

The races, attempting to see who can shower the quickest, are just one of the many ways that students are trying to conserve water and energy for Ohio University's Residence Challenge, which kicked off Sunday, Jan. 20.

The competition is open to residents of all active halls (Lincoln is under renovation) and encourages them to conserve with a little incentive: a trip to Cedar Point on May 11.

The challenge started some five years ago, according to Sonia Marcus, sustainability coordinator at Ohio University. At the start of the competition, each residence hall is given a "baseline" or average energy/water usage based on the data from the previous three years. The competition, which ends March 8, pits the residence halls against one another as they try to lower their consumption below the baseline by the largest margin. A hall from each green will be declared a winner.

The challenge is coming off of its most successful year, and the stakes just keep getting higher. Last year, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that were avoided due to energy conservation efforts totaled 106.6 tons, which Marcus estimates is equivalent to taking 6,250 cars off the road for an entire day.

"We keep ratcheting up the standards every year," she said. "Every year they use less energy and water; it keeps making it more difficult to show gains."

Last year, 210 students went on the Cedar Point trip. It works as an incentive because students know every bit of their personal effort counts, Marcus said. Each winning hall selects the top participating students for the trip. The more energy and water saved, the more students who can qualify to go.

The residence halls find creative ways to conserve as much as possible, Marcus said. Students reported to her that they created the "Power Shower Relay Races," and some overzealous residents

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even posted "out of order" signs on water fountains to save on water usage. "Not that I encourage that," she said laughing.

The Office of Sustainability also reminds students to turn off the lights when they don't need them. Last year, the university sponsored a program that switched incandescent light bulbs to more energy-efficient compact fluorescents.

Highlights of the challenge this year include:

- new cardboard trophies that will sit in the lobby of the leading residence halls as the competition goes on;
- the return of preprinted post-it notes that RAs can stick on their residents' doors if they see utilities left on; and
- shower hangers reminding students to shower in eight minutes or less (and this year, they're printed on recyclable materials as opposed to vinyl, which fits with the theme of the challenge, Marcus said).

This year also marks the addition of the new hall, Adams, to the competition. (Its baseline is based on a hall of a similar size.)

While the contest only lasts roughly seven weeks, Marcus hopes the message of conservation will resonate with students for much longer.

"My goal is for students to feel a sense of empowerment about issues like climate change," Marcus said. "I think there are a lot of students who are concerned about these issues but think they're too big or amorphous so they chose not to take part. You should develop good habits because they're just as hard to break as bad ones."

More information about the Residence Challenge can be obtained at: www.facilities.ohiou.edu/conservation/ResidenceChallenge2008.htm.

If you wish to speak with a member of the media about this story, contact Media Specialist George Mauzy at 740-597-1794 or mauzy@ohio.edu or contact Sonia Marcus at 740-593-0026 or marcuss@ohio.edu.

Related Links

Residence Challenge Web page

<http://www.facilities.ohiou.edu/conservation/ResidenceChallenge2008.htm>

Office of Sustainability <http://www.facilities.ohiou.edu/conservation/>

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