



At a time when dire warnings about climate change dominate the headlines, we all have to start thinking about the little things, like how long your shower was this morning or what you're going to do with this copy of the *Gateway* once you're done reading it. But have you ever wondered what happens when you bring 40 000 people together in a condensed space? The degree of environmental impact is suddenly on a much larger scale.

Fortunately, one upside of bringing so many people together is that it generates a lot of ideas and innovation, and as a result, there are now measures being put in place by the University to curb our collective carbon footprint on the planet.

However, unlike the daily flow of students and staff, "going green" is not a change that can appear overnight. As Don Hickey, U of A Vice President (Facilities and Operations), explains, one important thing to consider when it comes to campus sustainability initiatives is practicality. For example, our chilly climate is a major factor: we can't rely on things like solar power all year long when winter days see only six hours of sunlight.

Still, Hickey explains that the U of A has always been smart about its sustainable measures, going back at least to 1972, when the university was a pioneer in paper recycling.

"If you look at our footprints, we've been very engaged on recycling, energy management programs, behavioural programs," Hickey explained.

The most recent step towards this planned reduction is last week's launch of a new recycling transfer centre. It will serve to compact recyclables on campus so that more can be done and fewer trips are necessary to off-campus recycling centres. It is estimated that 40 per cent (or 4200 metric tonnes) of the university's waste will be moved from landfills to materials recovery facilities. In addition, they will burn fewer fossil fuels in hauling recycling away.

The U of A's Sustainability Measures and Initiatives plan outlines various steps for a green future for the institution: by 2010, it wants to cut its output of waste by 30 per cent. Other measures are already in place: for example, the heater plug-ins in the parkades have timers and temperature sensors that won't let electricity run unless it's cold enough, and motion-sensor lights in offices and classrooms are also being installed.

The Environmental Coordination Office of Students (ECOS), a student-run organization operating as an official service of the Students' Union, is looking to engage students on this matter as well. According to ECOS director Lisa Dockman, her office oversees a variety of pro-

grams that deal with reducing the environmental effects caused by students.

"That means we operate programs and services to encourage students to live more environmentally friendly lifestyles and to make more life-sustainable decisions," Dockman explains.

The mission statement of ECOS is, she says, to educate and involve, research and recommend, and provide resources. They educate with "Green Res" presentations for Lister Hall, East Campus Village, Newton Place, HUB, and other campus residences, and on campus with their "Living Green" presentation. ECOS is also responsible for educating SU employees about environmental awareness. Thanks to a new direction for ECOS this year, they now play a role in advising the SU regarding policy changes and review and examine existing policies to encourage environmentally sustainable implementations whenever possible.

In addition to their educational programs, ECOS runs a bike library, which rents out bikes to students for \$40 per month. They have also engaged in a naturalization project in the courtyard of the Education Building: ECOS encourages native plant species to be grown here, so there is less need for maintenance and irrigation. Finally, ECOS also manages the Campus Community Garden situated in East Campus Village, which grows organic herbs and vegetables and is maintained entirely by ECOS volunteers. Hickey also added that the university takes care to plant species native to Alberta throughout campus.

Lister Hall is working on its own eco-friendly measures with the guidance of the Enviro Committee, directed by Jenna Rodgers. Rodgers explained that they're working on piloting a composting project, called vermicomposting, on some of the floors in the four Lister towers. Each floor that volunteered is equipped with a 53L Rubbermaid bucket with soil and half a pound of red wiggler worms.

All of the organic waste on the floor is placed in that bucket, which is periodically emptied. As for other floors implementing the composting, there's a financial concern.

"I've had ten floors express interest and [...] that's pretty much a quarter of [Lister]. I still have people asking me about it; it's just that we don't have the funds to provide every floor with a vermicomposting bin," Rodgers said.

"Let's face it: Alberta doesn't have the best recycling initiatives at all, so not a lot of people grow up with recycling [...] composting," she continued. "If you teach a handful of people that, yes, paper is recyclable, and no, it's really not difficult to do, hopefully that's a habit they can take back to their households and teach [others]."

Lister also recycles their bottles, which can accumulate to a colossal amount, much of which the Enviro Committee donates back to the Residences while keeping a portion for themselves.

However, these amounts pale in comparison to the costs of implementing green initiatives and technology in the first place. As Hickey explains, apart from a commitment to sustainability, fiscal responsibility is also a part of the university's mandate.

Maintaining energy-saving and environmentally friendly infrastructure, he says, can be incredibly costly, adding that the university has to make sure that each initiative is cost-effective, and that students are getting their money's worth.

"If we made a policy that said we will buy 20 per cent of our power from renewable energy resources, that could mean an extra six or seven million dollars cost to our budget," Hickey said. "It's always cost [versus] effect: if six of seven million goes there, where won't it go?"

The consequences of ignoring costs in an environmental equation, he says, would probably detrimentally affect the University: staff positions, for example, could be affected, and tuition could be hiked up by several thousand dollars.

As for the involvement of individuals regarding eco-friendly habits and lifestyles, there's one thing that Hickey and Rodgers both agree on: behavioural changes are necessary. This includes many small changes that make a difference in the long run, Rodgers says.

"For me, it's not about telling people, 'Compost in your houses, do all this, buy everything organic.' I mean, that's great; it's a choice you can make. But start simple. Throw your paper in the right bin. Throw your bottles in the right bin," she said.

Rodgers also believes that in caring and showing that these small habits matter to you, you may inspire others to do the same.

"I would really encourage people to not be apathetic. Even if they're not going to come out to meetings or stand on a green box and shout out green colours or whatever, just be aware of what's around you."

Campus recycling initiatives

While the University has operated recycling services on campus for over 30 years, 2007 marks some of the most significant changes to its programs. Building & Grounds Services has recently constructed a Recycle Transfer Station (RTS), which allows for increased recycling capacities and the recycling of all types of plastics, glass, and light materials. It's also the first station of its kind in Alberta.

Buildings & Grounds Services is also implementing new colour-sorted recycling bins across campus, as well as trialing composting programs for both organic food wastes and paper towels from washrooms.

Where to recycle on campus

It's relatively easy to find a place to recycle drink containers, but it can be a bit trickier to find receptacles for a lot of other things on campus, including paper sometimes.

Cell phones, batteries, ink cartridges, and paper can be deposited at the recycling boxes offered at the InfoLink booths in SUB, CAB, HUB, and ETLIC.

Ink cartridges can also be recycled at the University Bookstore (lower level) and the Students' Union Print Centre (lower level SUB).

Egg cartons (cardboard or styrofoam) can be given to Campus Food Bank, who will reuse them.

Clarification

In last week's feature, entitled "Growing Pains: Construction at the University Kicks into High Gear" (18 October), University Architect Len Rodrigues is quoted as saying, "I really like South Lab because it's going to be one of our first 'lead' buildings, so it's going after a sustainable agenda." However, this should have read "LEED buildings."

So, what is LEED?

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design is a Green Building Rating System designed specifically for Canadian climates and construction codes, and is based on the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). LEED status for construction and renovation projects is achieved through a credit-based process that examines sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality, as well as additional innovation and design processes. LEED projects are then assessed one of four levels of certification: Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.