

# How green is your campus?

*“Potential to act as blueprint for big business”*

Last month during Earth Hour cities around the world played their part in a communitarian effort to curb energy consumption on a mass scale. With climate change hype proliferating, *Utimes* hit the campuses to find out just what our universities are doing about the problem.

One obvious thing to note is the massive growth of environmental studies – in fact it is the biggest growth sector among tertiary applications, with more and more programs being devised to cater for demand.

Swinburne University was the first Australian university to sign a sustainability covenant with the EPA, and their new Diploma of Sustainability is already showing great promise.

Other shorter programs such as Monash University's Green Workplace course, Waste Audit Training and Environmental Officer Training courses are also new developments.

But the nuts and bolts of sustainable development rests on its application, not just the theory, and this is the area where the true power and influence of universities needs to – and to

a large extent – is showing its prowess.

Successes can be pointed to in energy and water management, ecology and biodiversity, waste reduction and recycling, green office programs, eco-building design, environmental risk assessment and green purchasing. Sustainable transport though is one notable area where many universities are struggling to find solutions.

Monash University has a 'Greening Up Our Act' scheme to encourage a range of strategies and ideas. The university is one of the largest energy users in Victoria and its initiatives have the potential to act as a blueprint for big business.

It boasts five environmental committees, and has at least eight full-time environmental positions to manage different action areas. Simple ideas like colour coded recycling bins and organic waste buckets in staff offices are partly responsible for a 40 per cent recyclable material usage, and the production of 5000 Eco Mugs has reduced the number of disposable cups. A number of water saving strategies have also been implemented, including three 45,000 litre tanks that use stormwater and recycle irrigation runoff to water a sports ground.

More sophisticated developments include adhering all new building and infrastructure to an ecologically sustainable model, such as the Monash Science Centre, which



Monash has slashed the number of disposable cups thrown away on campus by handing out Eco-mugs to students.

has been designed in conjunction with Green Building Council Australia.

La Trobe University has created five full-time environmental positions – such as a Sustainable Transport Officer and an Energy/Water Manager – as well as three committees: Sustainable Resource Management, Wastewise, and Greenhouse Challenge committees.

La Trobe also generates its own electricity and hot water from natural gas using a highly efficient co-generation plant, with some of this electricity fed back into the power grid used by the local community.

In the past three years the university has reduced water consumption by 20 per cent and waste to landfill (through recycling) by 27 per cent, with total energy consumption reduced by 3 per cent.

Swinburne's 37 waterless urinals – installed last year – will save over 600,000 litres of water annually, and its new 300,000 litre tank for black water capture will be used on its gardens.

Lighting initiatives such as low energy T5 bulbs throughout the campuses, movement sensors and glass walls (to maximise natural light) in refurbished buildings are helping to reduce

energy consumption, while a new \$100 million building planned at the Hawthorn campus is going to be five star green energy rated.

Victoria University is also on the building bandwagon, with plans for a new 5.5 star green energy rated building in 2010, as well as implementing many water and voltage saving initiatives. Another key feature of VU's approach is its 'PCs For Kids' program; a not-for-profit organisation that refurbishes old computers and donates or sells them at a reduced price to children and their families. 1000 indigenous plants have also been planted around campuses.

The University of Melbourne has allocated \$3.5 million during 2008/2009 to implement energy management initiatives identified during an energy audit carried out in 2006, and claims the Dookie, Creswick and Burnley campuses to be 100 percent green energy users. The university is aiming for a 50 per cent reduction in its carbon footprint by 2010, with an ambitious long-term aim of reducing it by 100 per cent come 2030.

The new Economics and Commerce building aims to achieve at least a five star green rating which will potentially each year reduce 2400 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, 5.4 mega litres of water consumption, and increase natural ventilation by 150 per cent.

Senior vice-principal Ian Marshman says the

University of Melbourne has a key role to play in reducing environmental impact.

“The university has a population of around 50,000 using an extensive range of complex equipment necessary to its teaching and learning and research activities.

“That makes it important for this university to show strong leadership in the sector and in the general community in making a substantial move toward carbon neutrality.”

Deakin University has a unique scrap metal recycling program which eliminates approximately 40 cubic metres of landfill each year, as well as specifically designed cigarette “butt-bins” which have reduced pollution to stormwater drains and waterways. They've also reused original timber from the refurbishment of a building at the Geelong Waterfront campus to make furniture, handrails, decking and screens, and even clocks, pens and picture frames.

Public transport however remains a problem for many campuses, notably La Trobe and Monash who have massive campuses in the outer suburbs.

Both universities proclaim a TravelSmart program, but the recommended initiatives are nothing more than (often infeasible) commonsense solutions such as car-pooling, walking or cycling, with no real development of alternative modes of travel. □

**Daniel Vigilante**

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