



The **UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA**
Environmental Concerns Committee

Minutes

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE MEETING 11/2/2017

Call To Order

A meeting of the Environmental Concerns Committee was held in Gould Hall on November 2nd, 2017. It began at 9:00 AM and was presided by Jeff Widener, with Alex Nongard as secretary.

Attendees

Voting Members in Attendance: Alex Nongard, Jeff Widener, Sara Mata, Michelle Burke, Allyson Wiley

Ex-Officio Members in Attendance: Jeremi Wright, Dorothy Flowers, Dave Hambright, Brian Holderread, Kolt Vaughn, Trent Brown, Suchi Bhattacharjee, Tom Burns

Agenda Items

I. Updates

A. Environmental Stewardship Award

Jeff: Welcome. Are there updates on when we should send the award nomination solicitation for the Environmental Stewardship Award?

Dave: I suggest before the break, with a reminder after, so that we have maximum exposure.

Jeff: I think Burr is taking care of the flyer and nomination process. How about right after Thanksgiving?

Dave: Is the nomination process long? Does it require letters of rec?

Suchi: No, just an explanation of why they're deserving. We can do it in Qualtrix

Dave: I recommend we do this as soon as possible, before Thanksgiving.

Alex: There is no reason not to wait, so we might as well do this as soon as the forms are ready, with reminders sent after.

Dave: We can include a link to the previous winners.

B. SGA Meeting with Landscaping

Alex: In other news, the Student Government Association Undergraduate Student Congress Problems and Projects Committee is meeting with Alan King to talk about sprinklers on campus tomorrow. Many students have questions and concerns about how any why we water things on campus, and even if there is a good reason for it, it's not well communicated to people at large.

C. Made in Oklahoma Festival

Dot: Our Housing and Food Made in Oklahoma Festival was a hit – we had so many vendors and students participating that it was almost overcrowded. We are putting out calls for all sorts of supplies, and we're swamped with bids. We buy many things local, such as beef, eggs, jellies, sauces, etc. We also try to buy equipment made in Oklahoma, and if we can't, definitely energy star certified.

D. Earth Month

Dave: Earth Month at OU is the 26th of March to the 20th of April. It's inconvenient, because World Water Day is in the middle of spring break and Earth Day itself is on a Sunday, so our celebrations will be truncated. On the 16th we have Adam Rome coming to talk, a historian of Earth Month. We're working on another panel based on Science and Religion. There are huge misunderstandings in the general public over the compatibility of both belief systems. So, we are bringing in two major environmental religion scholars to speak, with Charles Kimbal from RELS presiding. One of our committees is approaching our state agencies to create a panel of environmental challenges in Oklahoma. We have an idea for a fourth event, but that's not planned out. Some students have suggested making a student panel, but we're trying to find students who are willing to participate. We're trying to stay local as much as possible.

Brian: Has anyone tried to reach out to the Provost regarding his new book on the fall of Rome due to hygiene, weather, etc?

Dave: I have been trying to, it's a possibility. We also have a representative from the City of Norman, Debbie Smith, on our committee. She wants to make the City of Norman a partner with OU Earth Month. There will be a poster competition for kids in environmental issues at art walk that month, and we're going to try to do a similar thing there. We'd also like to have an environmental representative from OU – Trent, Jeremi, Sarah, etc. Everything this year is in the Union.

Jeff: One idea for a panel, if the student thing doesn't work out: a panel on a data consortium for Oklahoma environmental issues. Get people from the state to talk about how they use data and where they see the future of environmental data. Something applied for the students is useful.

Trent: My understanding is that there are very few places at the state level who are doing that. Data is not even on their radar.

Jeff: Yes, but it needs to be, and the forecasting of what kind of data skills will be necessary to have a positive impact on the environment would be a great topic.

Dave: USGS folks on south campus probably can know. They're so good at that, NASA has had them do their data crunching.

Trent: There are very few folks that can do that at the state level, their turnover and wages are so low.

E. Green Week and H&F

Allyson: Green week is April 16-20 this year, and I'm the chair again. We're recruiting students and starting planning very soon.

Dot: The Thursday of that week (19th) is going to be the H&F fair. The week later is Staff Week, so we're busy then. We can get the rock garden and the storm shelter for free, but the Union Ballroom is \$750 for

us, and \$250 for the courtyard. We get more people at the union, but if the weather is a problem we still have to pay. We'd prefer to do the storm shelter and courtyard.

Allyson: We could potentially get the Union courtyard for free, if Green Week gets UPB to waive the fees.

Dave: How well was it attended?

Dot: It was definitely fine being inside, but outside is nice because of accidental traffic. Inside is all intentional traffic, but we were still well attended.

Dave: Maybe at the fair we could have some short 10-minute lectures on environmental issues on campus?

Dot: Potentially. The storm shelters are well equipped for that with media connections.

F. Geography and GIS Days

Jeff: Geography day is coming up, 11-9, we have 175 high school students running around on south campus at the NWS. There will be posters there on civil rights and environmental justice. November 14th is GIS day in the Union Ballroom. We need more student speakers, but booths are an option if any of you want them. 9am-3pm.

II. Trent Brown Presentation from Environmental Health and Safety

Trent Brown: Handout for what the EHS office does.

- Regulated Waste Management:

We generate a bunch of Regulated Waste because of research operations on campus. This is not thrown in the trash, but incinerated, recycled, or special-purpose landfilled. Chemical waste is recycled if it can be, for fuel or other things. We incinerate highly toxic materials so that it does not linger in the environment. There are byproducts, but they are far less and far more manageable, a fraction of the materials. We send it to partner facilities that do this, like in Chicago, or Memphis and Houston. Side note: the largest concentration of regulated waste disposal / treatment facilities in the world is in Houston, and they were impacted heavily. That's never in the news.

Dave: What about our radioactive materials?

Trent: Depends. A lot if it is decayed and then thrown in the trash. Some things like plutonium, which we haven't had in a long time, could go to Hanford, WA or Indiana.

Tom: What's the half-life on things we throw away?

Trent: Depends, but between 14 days and 10 months. We are completely in accordance with all of the federal regulations regarding radioactive waste management.

- Biomedical waste disposal:

Here, we don't generate as much as HSC, but we still dispose of it as regulated medical waste.

We treat the waste via 1) steam sterilization (autoclave) or 2) incineration. We do this though a company called Stericycle in Stroud, which we audit regularly and is in accordance with state/federal regulations.

Our last campus audit for hazardous waste was 4 years ago and had not a single deficiency. We have a very expensive, very good facility on south campus that manages all of this waste, with a very serious commitment to doing this the right way.

- Research/Teaching Labs

We have 750+ labs across all of our campuses. We work with the labs to do annual inspections / audits to be in accordance with regulations but also to seek and find improvements. How can we use fewer chemicals or repurpose things for other uses? We encourage people to use material that creates less waste and is less harmful to people and the environment.

We get inventories of labs on an annual basis and encourage labs to dispose of chemicals on hand that they do not need, or donate them to us for recycling / redistribution.

Dave: What about phenols? They are not well-regulated within labs.

Trent: We do manage them as best we can, but because of their ubiquity it is harder to do this. We monitor them strongly in many places, such as the anatomy labs.

Trent: Fugitive emissions: Anything that goes through a fume hood and is an emission via research is unregulated, although we try to limit that as best we can. We get calls all the time that things smell bad or of gas leaks, but there are generally not detectable, detrimental levels of things in the air. The odor threshold for many chemicals, like gas, is much lower than the threshold necessary to do any damage to someone.

- Chemical Redistribution:

Trent: We have a chemical surplus inventory that reuses chemicals that we can share with others. This is not used extensively, because individual labs like to know the source and age of chemicals for quality control purposes, but it is an available option.

Dave: Regarding chemical redistribution: I know a lot of classrooms would be interested in using those chemicals, even if they're not lab-research grade.

Trent: Let them know to let me know what they need, and I can get it for them or keep an eye out for it. That's a good idea.

- Collaborative arrangements:

A lot of labs and research groups are sharing not only data and research results, but sustainable practices for labs and environmental health and safety. We encourage this.

Environmental Compliance:

- Water quality:

This is always an issue. We get lots of questions about hexavalent chromium and arsenic, both of which are far below the regulated limit. The water may look cloudy or smell poorly, but it's all incredibly well tested and completely safe. The filtered water stations only taste better because it's cold.

Tom: What about reverse osmosis systems for campus?

Trent: That would improve so much, but it's so expensive to do that it's not worth it considering how well we're already doing. RO systems are great, but very expensive. We had one department request we look into it for their building, and there alone it would have been millions of dollars upfront, with 20 years of specialty maintenance. It's not happening any time soon here.

Tom: I recommend everyone read up on bioaccumulation. Just because we meet the standards now doesn't mean we're safe on an existential level. The EPA can change the allowable limit, and do, regularly.

Trent: I agree that we should have higher water safety standards, absolutely – but we need to find a way to pay for it first.

- Irrigation:

We have all well water for irrigation - nothing potable. It's annoying, but there's work being done. There are changes coming on, so it's the right time for student groups to get their voices heard.

Dave: There's potentially some benefits to using arsenic water – our plants might be filtering arsenic out, actually, according to a research professor I spoke to.

Allyson: Do we use any recycled water?

Trent: Only on the golf course. We can't on campus because of EPA regulations.

- Storm water:

We have lots of trouble with this, because of how nature works. We are eventually going to start testing storm water. This is a big deal, because attribution of pollutants from non-point-sources is basically impossible. Pollutants are going to have to be controlled very well. Food for thought: we will not be able to prove that we did not originate a pollutant, and neither will anyone else.

Dave: Everyone is downstream from someone.

Jeff: And with that, we will adjourn. Thank you all for attending. Next month's speaker will be Brian Holderread with Architecture and Engineering Services.

Meeting ends 10:03