

## The Register-Guard

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### **BOB DOPPELT: All departments need to follow UOs green path**

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**BY BOB DOPPELT**

*For The Register-Guard*

**Published:** *Midnight*, Oct. 15

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Relentless summer heat waves, along with historic droughts, wildfires and ice melt in the Arctic, have made the frightening early impacts of human-induced climate disruption obvious. It lifts our spirits to see large organizations responding to the crisis. The University of Oregon is one of those institutions.

As I was writing this column, however, the story broke about a project that seems to violate the university's sustainability policies. So I'm also going to discuss the need for every UO department to get on board the program.

First, the encouraging news. The university consistently ranks high among schools reducing their carbon footprint, and it recently got another feather in its cap. In August, the UO was recognized by Sierra, the magazine of the National Sierra Club, as one of the 13 "Coolest Schools" in the nation for its efforts to cut carbon emissions and adopt other sustainability practices.

The UO started its journey in 2007 when former President Dave Frohnmayer signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. His signature pledged the UO to aim for net-zero emissions by 2050. The first step involved an analysis of the university's primary sources of emissions. This led in 2010 to the unveiling of a climate action plan. Although gross emissions increased from 2004 to 2009, they have declined by 7.5 percent since that time.

One reason for the reduction is that the new policy serves as a "hunting license" that allows people in different departments to investigate ways to cut emissions, according to Steve Mital, the UO sustainability director.

A good example is an ongoing major lighting upgrade. The UO is replacing outmoded T12 fluorescent light tubes with energy-efficient T8 tubes. Less energy use means less emissions — these changes are expected to save 1.5 million kilowatt hours of electricity, while also cutting the UO's energy bill by more than \$98,000 each year.

Another outcome of the "hunting license" is the Oregon Model for Sustainable Development. It caps total energy use from new developments.

Mital told me that even with new construction under way and more planned in the future,

the UO decided to “draw a line in the sand” to restrict the consumption of additional electricity and natural gas. This will be achieved through a systemic campuswide, not building-by-building, approach.

All new construction will be required to achieve LEED gold building standards that must produce 35 percent higher energy savings than state building codes require. In addition, the energy used in new buildings must be “mined” from existing facilities through efficiency upgrades. Savings will be “banked” for withdrawal later when new buildings need them.

This is all positive, but it will only prevent the growth of energy use. The next step will be to significantly cut energy use.

One likely focus is the reduction of natural gas, which accounts for over 50 percent of all energy used by UO. Natural gas is a fossil fuel that burns cleaner than coal, but still generates significant emissions. Considerable environmental and social damage can also result during the extraction process. It is not a sustainable energy option.

Another area that needs attention is air travel by faculty, staff and athletic teams. Although it consumes just a small amount of energy, air travel accounts for nearly half of the UO’s emissions. Even with these challenges, the progress made so far, combined with increased sustainability research, teaching (full disclosure — I teach part time at the UO), and community outreach indicate the UO is headed in the right direction.

If a large complex institution such as the university can cap and reduce its emissions, organizations of any size can do it.

Not all departments, however, seem to grasp the intent of the university’s sustainability policy. A UO alumni group is proposing to convert farm and forest land near Creswell into a new golf course for the UO golf team and others. In spirit, if not in practice, this project seems to violate the UO’s goal of reducing its impacts.

No matter how it is done, the conversion of farm and forestland into a golf course will undoubtedly generate significant environmental damage.

In addition, according to many people I spoke with, most area golf courses are struggling and a new facility could be fatal. One course manager told me, “We don’t need more golf courses — we need more golfers.” Another said that rather than building a new course, “Why don’t they just buy mine?” This option would be consistent with the policy of “mining” existing facilities for new uses.

The gears are in motion for big changes at UO. But to achieve success, every department must participate.

Bob Doppelt is executive director of The Resource Innovation Group, which is affiliated with the Center for Sustainable Communities at Willamette University, where he is also a senior fellow.

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