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Brock takes steps to determine carbon footprint

ENVIRONMENT

Posted By MATTHEW VAN DONGEN AND TIFFANY MAYER

Posted 5 hours ago

Brock University is being audited.

But rather than open up its financial books for scrutiny, the university will reveal what's in its garbage dumpsters, water bills and photo copy tabulators to find out just how big its carbon footprint is.

On the heels of a meeting at Queen's Park last week, where university presidents updated the province on what their respective campuses are doing to be as green as possible, Brock announced a carbon audit will be done on its main campus. It will reveal just how much greenhouse gas Brock is emitting.

The four-month study by Toronto's HR Carbon comes after two years of research by child and youth studies professor Richard Mitchell and student-led Ontario Public Interest Research Group to determine just how sustainable Brock's operations are.

Out of that initiative came the newly struck Sustainability Coordinating Committee. Mitchell, the committee cochair, is raring to find out what Brock can do better.

"Brock had a lot ongoing but had never really had a comprehensive measurement of its footprint," Mitchell said.

Mitchell and co-chair Tom Saint-Ivany have racked up a long list of sustainable actions Brock is already doing.

Styrofoam products have been scrapped in dining areas, replaced with biodegradable containers. Chemical cleaning products have been traded in for their greener counterparts. Fluorescent light tubes are being recycled after they've dimmed. New buildings are being constructed to the second highest green rating, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver.

Last week, the university also showed off its latest set of wheels, a \$23,000 Chrysler GEM, an electric service vehicle that looks similar to a Smart Car with a flatbed.

Brock also has a waste diversion rate of 60% with sights set on reaching the 80% mark.

"It's the setting of Brock in a UNESCO World Biosphere," Saint-Ivany said about the impetus to continue toward sustainability.

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"Any person, as they come onto the main campus, it's usually green," Saint-Ivany said. "Being on the Niagara Escarpment, people intuitively sense that. People are also bringing that sensitivity here and applying it."

But there's more that Mitchell, who also heads up the university's Fair Trade/Ethical Purchasing Committee, would love to see change.

Banning the sale of plastic water bottles comes to mind. The University of Winnipeg and Memorial University of Newfoundland have already done it, he noted.

Adding a sustainability officer is another goal to do green public relations work, keep an eye on policy developments elsewhere and make sure Brock's coincide.

Despite all eyes on the bottom line as Brock navigates its way through the recession, different faculties have chipped in to provide \$10,000 in seed money to conduct the audit -- something that Mitchell said will lead to money savings in time.

Cutting some costs by going green is "serendipitous" and secondary to his social justice agenda. Sustainability is the defining issue of our generation, he said.

Tackling the water bottle issue will be a costly one, however, when and if Brock decides to do that, Mitchell said. The long-term benefits of the more expensive actions can't be measured in dollars and cents but in quality of life, he added.

"That's how I envision sustainability," Mitchell said. "The sustainability statements that I've read talk about undertaking our current behaviours and actions so that future generations will not bear the brunt of our behaviour."

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Brock's campus is on a "biosphere reserve", true - but what has the university done with that biosphere reserve other than cover it with hectares of surface parking lots? Lessening the car dependency of the campus would be necessary in this regard, but the university is not serious about this. Getting rid of bottled water will be hard on campus, since the university high-ups don't want to do anything that ruffles the feathers of the businesses that have a monopoly on food and beverage delivery. Plus, there are practically no fountains to provide water if the bottles were taken away. I hope that this new sustainability officer does more than Public Relations. Brock doesn't need more green spin and rhetoric; it needs to take effective green action.

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