

Group aims at 'nitty gritty'

OSPIRG aids consumers

By STEVE DODGE
and CHRIS MAZZA
Of the Emerald

In the jungle of Consumerland, it often seems there is no one to help when it comes down to the nitty gritty. OSPIRG (Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group) has worked since its beginning in 1971 to change that.

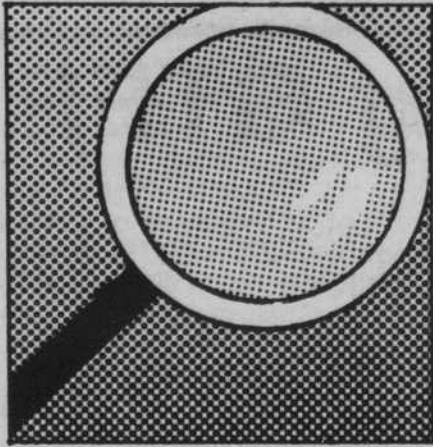
A Ralph Nader-inspired organization, OSPIRG's Eugene office in Suite 3 of the EMU is the largest and most active in the state and is second nationally in funding and scope only to the New York PIRG.

OSPIRG has consistently lobbied the legislature, state government agencies, officials and Congress for student interests in consumer and environmental affairs and civil rights.

As a part of those efforts, the group has studied and put out handbooks on auto repair, housing, small claims court, youth and the law, women's credit problems and a booklet on "How to Clean a River."

More recently the group has criticized Springfield's D Street bike path as unsafe, chastised the phone company for overcharging on deposits and taken exception to the Forest Service's RARE II study which OSPIRG says would limit Oregon's wilderness areas.

Environmental research accounted for 40 percent of



OSPIRG's activities last year, while consumer problems and civil rights issues encompassed the balance of OSPIRG's functions.

Currently OSPIRG is working for a change in the state's auto insurance laws to base rates on driving records instead of age, sex and other factors. The group is encouraging students to write letters to state Insurance Commissioner William Fritz and to sign a petition in the OSPIRG office to that effect.

"If a student has a problem in the general public interest or in the consumer, environmental or civil rights fields, OSPIRG will get involved by doing research on the problem," says local director and state vice chairer Randy O'Toole.

"We research problems and follow-up by taking action to implement the suggestions that we

make," he says.

As an example, the group investigated outdoor equipment shops, auto dealerships, sewing machine shops and appliance dealers in 1972 and 1973 for "bait and switch" activities.

OSPIRG turned its information over to appropriate district attorneys and the violators were forced to cease their activities or face fraud charges.

OSPIRG, O'Toole says, is entering a "new phase" which will see the group vigorously pursuing similar consumer problems.

O'Toole said OSPIRG is investigating hospitals to see if they have met federal requirements regarding free medical aid to the poor.

Students can help OSPIRG — and themselves — doing projects, applying for internship and staff openings or by simply phoning in their concerns.

OSPIRG, which has offices on all of Oregon's major college campuses, receives half its money from an 85 cent per term tuition charge and the rest from government grants.

More information can be obtained by calling 686-4073.

Petitioners earn vote against TV franchise

Enough signatures have been collected for a Springfield vote on approval of Teleprompter of Oregon's cable TV franchise, according to Don Chalmers, chairer of the Coalition for Community Television.

The coalition hopes to prevent Teleprompter from gaining a 15-year franchise. The CCT collected 1,200 signatures, but will require a January 9 special election because the Nov. 7 election is too close. The group needed to collect 1,030 signatures to put the issue on the ballot.

The coalition has appeared in opposition to the franchise before the three local governments that must approve it. The Eugene City Council has not yet approved the franchise, although an initial vote last week indicated they would.

Approval of the franchise by the Springfield City Council earlier this month prompted the coalition to seek a vote of all Springfield residents. The coalition decided against a county-wide vote because of the difficulty of collecting enough signatures.

The franchise is the result of two years of negotiations between Teleprompter and the Metropolitan Cable Television/Translator Commission. It was approved by the commission in August.

The CCT objects to the length of the franchise contract. The coalition also proposes that Teleprompter's franchise fee be earmarked for a public television station.

Teleprompter representative Peter Rodkinson says Teleprompter is not upset by the possible vote but is critical of CCT chairer Chalmers, however.

"We're tired of Don Chalmers representing (his interpretation) of our franchise," he says.



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