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OSPIRG cleans up rivers, companies

■ OSPIRG springs to action by working to purify the Willamette and set big corporations straight

Bennett Lacy
for the Emerald

It's Earth Week once again, but what does it mean to you?

Living in Oregon, you may have grown accustomed to doing your part in conserving the environment. But for those of you who are new to the green state, there is a well-known public interest organization on campus where you can get involved in anything from cleaning up the Willamette River to protesting companies who damage the environment.

OSPIRG is one of several groups that are a part of the Earth Week Coalition at the University.

"OSPIRG is here to give students an outlet to tackle issues at a statewide level and then bring results back to campus," says Erin Pursell, a junior political science major who is also OSPIRG's chapter chairwoman.

Although the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group has about 35 to 40 core members, everyone is welcome and encouraged to help out or attend meetings to find out what exactly OSPIRG has to offer.

OSPIRG deals primarily with social and environmental issues such as the Hunger Cleanup Campaign where OSPIRG volunteers visit homeless shelters in the Eugene area, cooking meals and cleaning up the area to help out those in need.

Another ongoing campaign is the effort to clean up the Willamette River. OSPIRG works to hold companies accountable for any pollutants they might dump into the river.

Recently, the federal government named the Willamette one of the most polluted rivers in the nation. OSPIRG's goal is to make polluters financially responsible for their actions, instead of placing the burden on taxpayers.

Now, in time for Earth Week, OSPIRG has another campaign in which your support is needed.

"The Eco-Pledge is a new tactic we have for working with companies to make them more environmentally conscious," Pursell said. During Earth Week, OSPIRG will be campaigning for signatures from students who pledge not to

work for companies that harm the environment.

The campaign is only six months old, but has already seen some success. Victories against Ford Motor Companies and General Motors saw both companies resign from the Global Climate Coalition.

"The Global Climate Coalition is an industry-backed front group that tries to deny concerns about global warming," Pursell said. Pursell also hopes that the recent success of the Eco-Pledge will give OSPIRG the chance to get more people involved.

For example, during Earth Week you can join OSPIRG and Eco-Pledge by pledging to not work for BP, which has proposed drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. Also targeted is Coca-Cola, which has yet to make good on a promise made nine years ago to begin using recycled materials in its bottling operations.

"Our goal is to get 4,000 signatures from students by Earth Day on April 22," Pursell said.

“Our goal is to get 4,000 signatures from students by Earth Day.”

Erin Pursell
OSPIRG chapter chairwoman

Earth Week activities throughout the week were organized by the Earth Week Coalition. Leslie Marcus, a member of the coalition, hopes that the week's activities will bring more environmental awareness to students on campus.

"The theme for Earth Week is 'solutions,'" Marcus said. "Our goal is to concentrate on the problems the earth faces and the solutions that the average student can contribute to make themselves more eco-friendly."

If you already consider yourself to be "eco-friendly," then you might want to take a look at what OSPIRG has planned for next year.

"One of our biggest campaigns for next year is pushing President Clinton to protect the last 4 percent of our National Heritage Forests," Pursell said.

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