

Driving to be green

Tim Maher, sustainability coordinator for CCC, studies greenhouse gas emissions to determine how the college can reduce pollution

By Jaime Dunkle
Associate News Editor

Carbon Dioxide. Methane. Nitrous Oxide. Volatile organic compounds. These are some of the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. Vehicles are one of the top polluters of these greenhouse gases into the Earth's atmosphere. Sustainability Coordinator Tim Maher is focusing on measuring and reducing Clackamas Community College's greenhouse gas emissions. Data collection is the essential way to give a number to Clackamas' GGE. Students took a GGE survey in May, and the information will contribute to the funding of sustainability projects, such as establishing a long-term shuttle to the college. Research data has come from several different groups — from the business office to fertilizer application, energy usage, natural gas usage, heating and cooling and refrigerants, but the most challenging part to obtain was commuting. The greenhouse gas inventory is what I'm finishing up now," Maher said. "It's been my main project for the past year." The Department of Environmental Quality requires employers with over 200 employees take the survey every two years, to calculate GGE. The recent survey by students is similar to the mandatory one that all employees had to take, except the new survey only calculates travel mileage.



MAHER

"Originally, the survey just asked number of trips per week," Maher said. "It just said that you did drive that day, and that's all the information they needed."

To estimate travel distance, DEQ referenced the average miles per trip for the average Portland Metro commuter, which is 8.2 miles.

"I don't think we should use that because we're probably going to be a lot higher than that," Maher said.

Maher teamed up with Environmental Health & Safety Officer George Sims and Website Coordinator Dean Walch and modified the preexisting survey to configure the precise amount of GGE contributed by students. One of the major changes was adding the Google Maps mileage calculator.

"We just made a couple of changes," Maher said. "It had to get approved by everybody, and that took a while."

The greenhouse gases inventory will be available publically in a few weeks, according to Maher.

The temporary shuttle from Clackamas Town Center to CCC is a green experiment to offer students an alternative to driving to the college. GGE results will implement the development of more clean — aka green — transportation for students and staff.

"As we move forward and make more and more energy efficient measures, we try to come up with all of these avenues to knock down our commuters," Maher said.

Any progress made will be traceable via the GGE surveys. The lack of public transit to the college makes it challenging to tackle transportation options.

"We know that public transit is not very good," Maher said about community transportation to CCC. "We're trying to come up with all these ideas."

The shuttle was one of those ideas. Making bus passes readily available was another. Some additional incentives and possibilities are feasible, while others are not. Regardless of the method, the goal remains the same — decrease the amount of GGE coming from CCC.

"The shuttle is a pilot. We're averaging about 60 people a day, and June 10 is the last day," Maher said. "After that, we are going to be collecting a lot of data on ridership."

Depending on how many people utilize the shuttle, it may or may not continue. The project will request more funds in the fall of 2010 and the money will not go through for about a year, according to Maher.

If the shuttle becomes permanent, a bike rack may be included because many people are requesting it.

Student Devon Seale is finishing a transfer degree at CCC. He takes public transit routinely from Molalla. When it comes to measuring GGE, Seale is skeptical about how the data will be used.

"It'll be interesting to see where they take it," Seale said.

Seale believes that global warming is a serious issue.

"I have seen some pretty strong evidence that it's not some myth people are coming up with," Seale said. "It's a fact, and it scares me, and anything we can do to combat that will be useful."

President of Associated Student Government Alyssa Fava supports the efforts of Maher and the GGE survey.

"Anyway we can help students get to and from campus cheaper, with less carbon emission, is awesome," Fava said.

Fava lives across from the campus and walks to and from campus every day.

"I think it's unfortunate how reliant we are on our cars," Fava said. "I think walking is a lost art."

sustainability

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