

Environmentalizing the office

Gateway offices miserably fail environmental audit

In the first of a two-part series in this issue, Gateway offices are audited by Brian Staszenski of the Environmental Resource Centre.

stories by Judy Evans
photos by Ron Sears

Most everyone is aware of the many problems facing our fragile environment. At this point, the question most often asked may be, "what steps can I take as an individual?"

With the Students' Union Environmental Awareness Week fast approaching, *The Gateway* decided to take a close look at its own waste disposal practices. To this end, Brian Staszenski and Jennifer Lowen of the Environmental Resource Centre were invited to conduct an

"environmental audit" of both *The Gateway* offices and the apartment of an editor. There was definitely room for improvement.

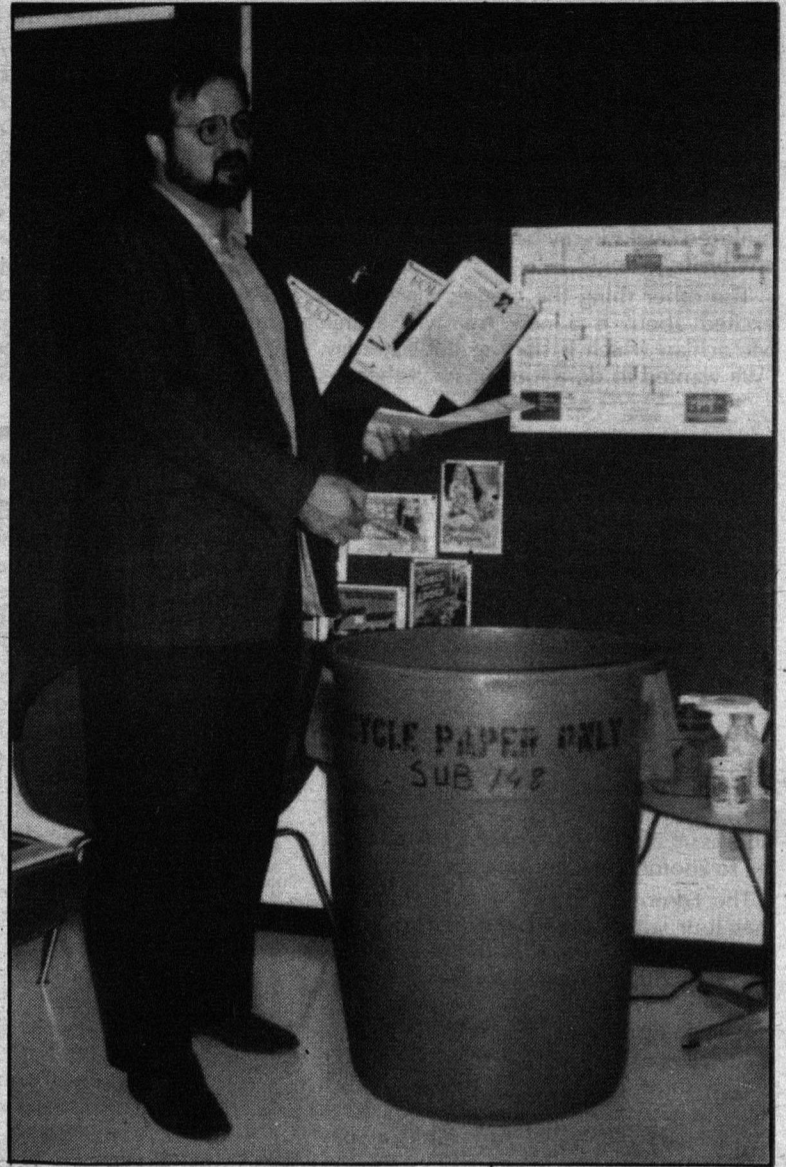
Staszenski, who toured the offices and the surrounding areas in the Students' Union Building, was clearly disappointed by the low level of environmental awareness displayed. Although *The Gateway* does recycle its newsprint, there was only one paper recycling bin available for general office use. This bin, the standard type used throughout the University, was poorly labelled and easily accessible only to those working in the main office. There were no signs or posters to remind staff of the correct use of the bin. "There should be *Think Recycle* signs all over the place," said Staszenski.

Also lacking in awareness materi-

al were the S.U.B. washrooms. The taps do not have automatic shutoff devices that reduce water waste. There were no signs posted urging users to conserve water. The drinking fountains got better marks — spring loaded auto-shutoffs prevent thoughtless users from leaving them running.

S.U.B. management scored higher than *The Gateway* in the Toxic Products Reduction category. Floors are cleaned with a harmless mixture of vinegar and water and there are as few chemical cleaners used as possible. *The Gateway's* photography lab got mixed reviews. On the plus side, all chemicals were in their original, labelled containers, with access to them tightly controlled. On the minus side, they were not clearly marked as to their

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"There's hair in here," said Environmental Auditor Brian Staszenski of the paper recycling bin in *The Gateway* office. *Gateway* staff defended that the hair was in the container when they got it.



Home economist Jennifer Lowen recommends using a phosphate-free, biodegradable dishwasher liquid.

"The disposable society is ruining our planet."

hazardous natures and, worst of all, waste chemicals were disposed of down the sink, when they could be recycled.

Can this office be saved? Yes it can.

Firstly, awareness must be heightened, explained Staszenski. Lack of promotion is a big problem. People need to be reminded to recycle and recycling bins must be readily accessible. Plastics, glass and metals could easily be separated from other garbage and sent for recycling. The University could make money from its paper recycling program if it had separate disposal

bins for different grades of paper. Mixed paper, if it isn't thrown out due to handling problems, is worth approximately \$10 per tonne, the same price that newsprint fetches. High bond paper fetches \$60 per tonne and used computer paper is worth as much as \$110 per tonne.

"I am convinced that the University could fund its whole waste management system if they recycled everything," Staszenski said. "The amount of paper that gets flushed through here in one day is tremendous."

The chemicals in *The Gateway's* photo lab can be recycled. A box for refundable soft-drink containers can be placed in the main office and someone can be cajoled into taking them to the bottle depot (for some quick cash perhaps?).

However, recycling itself isn't enough. Heightened awareness is not enough. Step by step, changes must be made in our lifestyles to get away from disposables. A good start, says Staszenski, would be to carry your own coffee cup in order to avoid using the styrofoam cups supplied by most caffeine merchants.

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