

6-percent drop in greenhouse gases highlights efforts to curb future emissions

Hudson Lockett

Daily Texan Staff

Published: Friday, March 6, 2009

Updated: Friday, March 6, 2009

The first inventory of UT's greenhouse gas production shows about a 6-percent drop between 2004 and 2006 and will likely provide the foundation for future efforts to curb emissions at the University, officials said Thursday.

The report, conducted by research and consulting firm Good Company, includes the main and J.J. Pickle Research campuses and places total emissions of greenhouse gases as equivalent to 295,531 metric tons of carbon dioxide. The inventory classifies UT as performing somewhere in the mid-range of comparable universities with completed inventories, including the University of California, Berkeley.

"The greenhouse gas inventory is really the first step," said Michael Miller, director of facilities services.

Miller said the report would serve as the basis for future efforts by UT to improve efficiency and cut greenhouse gases, a job which would see large involvement from the facilities services department.

"We had to know where we are and where we've been to be able to develop a comprehensive approach," he said.

Joshua Skov, the principal researcher at Good Company who worked on the inventory, cautioned against definitively comparing UT to other universities.

"It's more important to look where the big emissions sources are and look for the opportunities," Skov said.

He said ways to decrease emissions could include upgrading the physical plant, including upgrading steam-escape vents and technology, but that individual behavior was the most important component of improvement.

"At some point we need to start asking about the way people turn on lights or don't turn on lights," he said. "Maybe even down to the plugging in of computers."

The use of natural gas to generate electricity and steam, as well as to chill water, was the largest of the core group of emissions measured by the inventory, factoring in at nearly 80 percent of total emissions in direct control of the University.

Several messages left by The Daily Texan for Rong Fu, a climate change professor in the Jackson School of Geosciences, to discuss the findings, were not returned before press time.

Miller said the utilities department deserved much of the credit for the 6-percent drop.

"I know that the folks at the utilities department have done a great job," he said.

The decrease in natural gas consumption was due to increased efficiency in the physical plant, said Juan Ontiveros, executive director of utilities and energy management.

Ontiveros linked improvement to implementing newer, more efficient chilling stations and the use of inlet air cooling, a process that lowers the temperature of air in chilling stations to increase its density.