UCSB sets out on a course to go beyond green

Goal is to be free of resources that are irreplaceable.

By MORGAN GREEN
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The UCSB community is immersed in putting together a plan to make the entire campus environmentally sustainable — a goal that means operating without using up any of the world's irreplaceable resources.

Campus officials, among them Sustainability Coordinator Fern Pollegren, recognize that the notion of an institution with 20,000 students and thousands of faculty and staff cannot exist without using any "environmental footprint" whatsoever may be a quixotic goal, but say that's no reason not to try.

In keeping with that do-no-harm doctrine, she said the campus expects to produce its first strategic plan of action in a few weeks. The strategy is being brainstormed by representatives of every major campus function and coordinated by a sustainability committee of staff, faculty and students. The plan "will have recommendations, goals and projects for us to work on to become more sustainable.

Chancellor Henry T. Yang launched the effort with $75,000 from his office. With the top executive overseeing a 40 percent reduction in energy use, the movement, every segment of the campus community is involved. "We need everybody's buy-in to make this work," said Ms. Pollegren.

The University of California has a systemwide "green" building policy, and a clean-energy policy in place. "But we're going beyond that," she said. "We're really pushing for new ground for sustainability and holding the torch" for other UC schools. "We're the first to have an active sustainability goal: "

A long-range aim is to influence attitudes and practices off-campus by demonstrating the campus and faculty learned what sustainability is, and how to move toward it through a method called The Natural Step, which outlines how institutions can rethink their use of energy and resources and find more efficient, less costly and environmentally neutral substitutes.

"The reception so far has been really positive," said Ms. Pollegren. "Nothing happens over a weekend, but we set goals forthright for the near future, and hopefully see in 20 years.

UCSB already has a reputation as an environmentally conscious campus. Earlier this fall, it was listed by a nationwide coalition of students as one of the top 30 universities in the U.S. for its efforts to reduce pollution.

One example is a recent drastic cutback in landscape chemicals and herbicide, from 26 gallons a year in 2003 to "one or two" in special circumstances, said Ms. Pollegren. Officials also hope to divert at least 60 percent of the campus waste to recycling within two years. At present, it's under 60 percent.

UCSB has received national recognition for its new Donald Bren School of Environmental Science, which was one of the first buildings in the nation to earn the lofty "platinum" rating under standards set by an industry group called Leadership In Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED.

In November, Givetz Hall, which contains offices and classrooms, became the first building at UCSB to receive a LEED "silver" rating. Improved lighting and ventilation upgrades that cut energy and water use, reduced waste, improved recycling and discontinued the use of toxic cleaning chemicals. "For a building that went up in 1963, a silver rating is pretty good," said Ms. Pollegren.

Several "green" practices have already been launched at other buildings on campus, and more of