



Ecomania Kicks Off Composting at SP

By Jean-Philippe Coutu
member of the
environmental committee

Dear SP residents,

On Feb 9 took place the Ecomania Coffee Hour, kicking off a semester full of local to national green initiatives such as the new compost pick-up service at SP, the upcoming Greening the Northwest event between our graduate communities (more info to come), the release of the GSC report in March by its Sustainability Task Force as well as the nationwide Recyclemania competition among educational institutions that started on Feb 6th and will end on April 2nd. If you were not one of the 80 participants at the coffee hour, here is a detailed version of what we very briefly discussed prior to the challenging Hall Competition:

1. Composting Survey

We initiated a compost survey last semester to learn more about the habits and needs of our graduate community and to generate evidence and support for taking action. With 10% participation, we found out 84% were aware that there were compost bins at SP, 72% knew where they were and only 18%

used them on a regular basis. This last number is probably biased considering the residents that took the survey had more interest in the matter, and 76% of them actually believed that less than 5% of SP actually composts right now on a regular basis. Despite that, a plurality of 48% believed that given the proper tools and education, 20 to 50% of SP would start composting. When asked about concurrent solutions that would increase the composting rate, a regular pick-up service had the largest approval with 63%, and the use of compostable bags had 52% support. Changing the location of the bins was also high on the list (53%), but when asked about a better location, there was no consensus and most of the suggestions were followed by comments at the end of the survey that outlined why they would not be ideal solutions.

2. New Compost Pick-Up Service

Following our campaign, MIT facilities donated to SP two new bins and arrangements with the cleaning staff for the pick-up service were made by Jack (Jack Ahern, SP's House Manager), who was very cooperative. Com-

post bags were funded by the House Council and everything was ready by the Ecomania Coffee Hour. The system is **ACTIVE NOW:** you can take a compost bag in the lobby by the reception, fill it with your compostable products, put it outside your door like you would normally do for trash and the staff will pick it up and put it in the compost bins for you. And then repeat! Please give us your feedback on the bags as we are experimenting with this brand. We chose small capacity bags so that compost does not accumulate in your room, since 74% told us that they were producing less than 2 pounds per week. Also, regular disposal prevents any concern about odors in the halls. If you are worried about smell in your room once you start composting, please realize that it will not smell different than your regular trash, and if you establish good practices and compost only what can be composted (see notice by the compostable bags in the lobby), it should not smell at all.

3. General Composting Information

Another highlight of the compost survey was that 39% believed they needed to know

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more about composting, what it is, how it works and the related environmental/economic impacts. In a nutshell, compost is a stable organic product that is a wonderful fertilizer and soil conditioner and that has 100% potential to be converted into food and crops. The underlying process of composting is decomposition or carbon oxidation, where aerobic bacteria break apart the elaborate structure of plants and animals into its most basic constituents. Those bacteria thrive on an approximate diet of 50% carbon for energy and 50% nitrogen for reproduction, with oxygen and water as necessary substrates. Practically, domestic compost is done by adding water, shredding compostable products to increase surface area for bacteria to proliferate, and providing good aeration. At SP, we are simply collecting the compost and it is then picked up by the company Save That Stuff. Composting is done because otherwise the organic matter that could return back to the earth is stored away in landfills, which are unsustainably expanding. Without composting, we effectively use life on this planet and trash it, preventing its renewal through normal processes and breaking its circle.

4. Green raffles, Terracycle and Recyclemania competition

Since the start of the last semester, 1163 people participated in the regular coffee hour and brunch green raffles and saved 2863 single-use utensils. Participation has been varying between 30% and 90% for cof-

You can compost

- Any plant matter
- Egg shells
- Bread, rice, pasta
- Napkins
- Coffee and tea products

You cannot compost

- Meat and fish
- Eggs (except shell)
- Dairy products
- Colored paper
- Ash/excrements
- Plastic

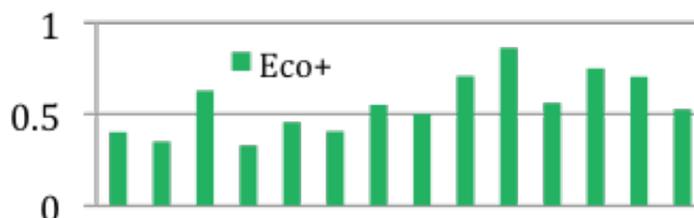
fee hours and is stable around 70-80% for brunches. If you do forget to bring your own utensils, please do not trash the eating ware available at SP, since it is compostable and we pay extra fee for that. Simply dispose them into the red bins that are in the middle of the room and we will compost it for you. During the Ecomania House Cup, Yu-Pu Wang was awarded with a laundry rack for being the most active participant in the green raffles. Also, David Rosen has won the book "The Story of Stuff" by participating in the up-cycling campaign, during which

a total of 91 cheese and paper products packages, toothbrushes and toothpaste tubes were collected. Please let us know if you care about upcycling (www.terracycle.net) in order to create the same support as the compost survey did, as we do have plans for its long-term implementation SP-wide. Also, be conscious that we have single-stream recycling at SP, as well as a battery disposal unit and technocycle for small electronics (e.g. cell phones, keyboards, mice, cables, CDs, DVDs and other disks, drives and tapes) in the lobby. Finally, look around

Brunches (Oct '10 to Jan '11)



Coffee Hours (Sep '10 to Jan '11)



for posters and check the MIT Facilities website for the nationwide Recyclemania competition, for which amounts of trash and recyclables will be compared between institutions and on a per capita basis.

5. House Cup: Ecomania Scavenger Hunt and Trivia

Clues about Ecomania trivia were posted around SP more than a week before the House Cup and hall councilors and their teams were able to collect them while exploring common and remote locations within our residence. The first question of the trivia was about the electricity consumption at SP, averaging about twice the state consumption per capita. Only 4North managed to answer the question correctly, as the online tracker (tinyurl.com/sp-electricity) providing the clue went down right before the event. One of the three questions for which clues were not provided was completely missed by every hall and shocked the audience by showing the fact that 55-65% of the total waste generated in the US in 2009 came from residential locations and not from commercial or institutional locations. A tie-breaker question was used, asking for the best estimate of the amount of waste SP produces over a year, considering MIT as a whole produces 3000 tons. The question being open to all teams, the 6th floor was the only floor to guess the exact quantity of 150 tons, equivalent to 2.5x30x30 cubic meters (8x100x100 cubic feet) of styrofoam trashed per resident per year. At the end of a fierce competition, 3 South, 4 North and 6th Floor won the 1st,

2nd and the 3rd place respectively. Our most sincere apologies to the 6th and 9th floor for the confusion, a revision of the scores revealed that 6th floor actually deserved the 3rd place.

Never hesitate to send us an email at sp-environment-chair@mit.edu if you have any ques-

tion/suggestion/comment or would like to get involved in our environmental committee, spearheaded by Ece, our dedicated environment chair. Also, thanks to George, Amy, Chelsea, Niaja, Diana and coffee hour volunteers for their help during the preparation and the course of this event.



S-P Residents enjoyed the night in House Cup-Ecomania Coffee Hour

Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee



Residents from S-P Hall 3-North in House Cup-Ecomania Coffee Hour

Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee

Sidney-Pacific Winter Resident Concert

By Jessica Leight
Music Chair

On Sunday, January 30, Sidney-Pacific hosted the most recent in its ongoing series of resident concerts, this time in conjunction with an art exhibit of resident photography and drawing. Co-organized by the music and arts chairs, this was an opportunity for all SP residents to showcase their musical and artistic talents! Five ensembles performed to an audience of around 40 people, who then enjoyed refreshments and took some time to enjoy the art. The performances included Irish music by Ronan McGovern and Mark Chilenski, guitar performances by Yu-Pu Wang and Coppe Gerrit van Urk, a vocal performance by the Northwest Chorus and Cantonese opera by Pui-Wa Li.

The diversity of performances was wonderful and showcased the range of musical talent in the MIT community. In the past, other resident concerts have included classical ensembles, full-fledged bands, and many vocalists and guitarists. The SidPac multipurpose room is a wonderful space for musical performances, and we could make use of drums, piano and a great audiovisual system. Resident concerts are a regular event at SidPac and are always popular and widely enjoyed. If you play or sing any type of music, either on your own or with others, you should consider sharing this talent with the SP community! If you're interested, contact Jessica Leight, the music chair, at sp-music-chair@mit.edu

Upcoming Events!

Don't miss them!!

- 2/23 Coffee Hour
- 3/1 Nominations Dinner
- 3/2 Coffee Hour
- 3/3 CoSI Lectures
 - Professor Munther Dahleh
- 3/9 Coffee Hour
- 3/13 Brunch
- 3/16 Coffee Hour
- 3/31 CoSI Lecture
 - Professor Joshua Winn

Sidney Pacific Speaker

Newsletter Chair
Yi-Ting Chen

The Speaker is published on a monthly basis to serve the needs of the Sidney Pacific Graduate Community. Submissions of articles, photos, events, and other items of interest can be sent to:
sp-newsletter-chair@mit.edu



S-P Residents enjoyed the Chocolate Party on 2/13, Sunday evening.

Courtesy of SP Photofile Committee