

EQ members take back Earth Day

By John McDonagh

Instead of participating in this year's Winter Carnival activities, 11 Middlebury students, all members of the Environmental Quality group, will be traveling to Philadelphia for the weekend to attend an emergency campus environmental conference.

The conference was jointly organized by several national environmental groups, including the state Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs), the Sierra Student Coalition, the Sierra Club, Campus Green Vote, Student Environmental Activist Coalition (SEAC) and Green Corps. This conference is a prelude to the 25th anniversary of Earth Day which is coming up on April 22, as part of the "Free the Planet: Earth Day '95" campaign. EQ hopes to bring back ideas and energy from the conference to use as a starting point for planning Earth Week here at Middlebury as well as the rest of the semester.

"In a general sense, what this conference is all about is taking back Earth Day from the big corporations which have slowly been turning it into their own advertisement playground over the last few years. Earth Day is about putting the planet first — above our own greed and big-headed economy — it's high time we send this clear message to the public,"

said Jonathan McDonagh '95, co-president of EQ.

More specifically, the goal of this conference is to inspire leadership within the student environmental movement and coordinate the efforts to gain a million signatures for a petition that will be sent to congress on Independence Day. The petition is a statement of 25

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tenets of environmentalism.

Ellen Zahren is the Burlington area organizer for Green Corps, a grass roots activism and environmental campaign organization. She has been coordinating environmental groups from colleges in Vermont, including UVM, Trinity and Middlebury, in order to get students to attend the Philadelphia conference.

Zahren cited highlights of the conference, including speakers

such as Gina Collins, the director of Green Corps, and Barbary Dudley, the director of GreenPeace USA. Zahren emphasized the importance of coming together in this manner for student environmentalists. "It is incredibly powerful that such a diverse group of students will be united," said Zahren. "We called the conference because the future is at risk for our generation and so we have to be the ones to act!"

Zahren went on to say that the emergency conference was called partly in response to the increasing corporate control of Earth Day, but also in response to the new Congress. She stated that the new Congress and Newt Gingrich's revolution are "poised to dismantle almost every environmental law in effect including the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, among others. These bills have been fought over long and hard and to see them destroyed would mean critical damage to the environmental movement. We must not allow that to happen if the future means anything." This issue is addressed among the 25 points listed on the petition.

McDonagh stated that the conference is not "some retro-sixties neo-hippy protest gathering, but a serious effort to discuss real issues

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and send a clear message to congress."

Furthermore, McDonagh stated that EQ is going to use the Free the Planet campaign as its central focus for the celebration of Earth Week in April. "This emergency

conference, and the campaign that surrounds it add a sense of poetic energy and importance to the 25th anniversary of Earth Day," he said.

"Of course every day is Earth Day, and we shouldn't forget it, but it helps to set a time each year

so we can focus and make a powerful statement.

"One of the biggest problems that the environmental movement faces, including groups like EQ, is that although we have a lot of interested people, the energy and creativity required for motivation is sometimes lacking.

"This is not necessarily due to laziness but because everybody is so busy with schoolwork or whatever else occupies their daily lives.

"By going to this conference, we are taking time to make the Earth our number one concern, and to do that as a group will be an extremely powerful motivational factor."

When students see what a difference they make by sorting colored paper from white, and box-board from plastic, their efforts will be realized as the environment gets cleaner, one recycle at a time.

McDonagh added that if anybody else wants to get involved with EQ or the conference, they should feel free to contact him at extension 4136 or at 388-1467 or to contact EQ co-president Hillery Hinds at extension 6951.



Emily Stone

EQ members proudly display the banner they will bring to the conference.