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# Panel emphasizes fixing the 'gap under the door'

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In the event of an emergency, you could always make your way to the exits by feeling for the draft, said Kurt Teichert, environmental stewardship initiatives manager at the Center for Environmental Studies, pointing to the door in List 120.

The comment elicited some snickers from the 50-person audience, but the statement was intended for more than just comic effect: It encapsulated one of the main messages of the three-person panel on Green Energy, that small-scale energy conservation measures may be the most effective.

In other words, those concerned about renewable energy should think about fixing that gap under the door before considering solar power, Teichert said.

The event, hosted by the student environmental advocacy group emPOWER, brought together Teichert, Christopher Bull, the Department of Engineering's senior research engineer and Assistant Professor of Economics Sriniketh Nagavarapu to discuss environmental issues, including the benefits of new technologies and the political and economic motivations for using more renewable energy.

Bull spoke about the inefficiencies of converting coal to electricity, saying "we lose over half of it along the way" to the wall socket. Part of this inefficiency comes from trying to synchronize use and demand, Bull said. Both politics and the economy, not just technology, will affect future energy use, he added.

Nagavarapu discussed the possible effects of the federal stimulus package, saying the economy's needs in the short term don't necessarily make sense in the long term for renewable energy policy. "It's not clear (that) we know what will be more competitive down the road," Nagavarapu said. Instead of throwing money at certain technologies, Nagavarapu said the government must create disincentives for oil use and fund basic research, and then allow the market to decide which new energies would be successful.

Teichert said very little might be done to overcome structural and technological barriers to energy efficiency in the next six months, but added that it is possible to create more basic interventions. Training people to help weatherize homes could go a long way toward conserving energy, he said.

Teichert said he always tells people to find ways to conserve energy before turning to alternative sources of energy.

The panel also discussed large-scale options, such as using more biofuels and creating a "smart grid" that would make energy use more efficient, but the emphasis of the event was on local solutions. Rather than relying on fuel produced halfway around the globe, Bull said, the solution is to use "local resources to meet local energy needs."

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