

# Call it 'spring greening'

By Angela McManaman



Kathy Guirk

Will the Merrill Hall lawn pass the dandelion test? The lawn is a testing ground for a natural lawn care regimen of aeration and composting. If the test is successful, dandelions will be choked out by healthy grass.

The university's sustainability experts remain hard at work on projects to reduce UWM's carbon footprint from the ground up.

Electrical Engineering Assistant Professor Adel Nasiri oversaw the recent installation of UWM's first solar-powered cells. Seventy-two panels on Bolton Hall now charge batteries, which can be used for backup power.

At the ground level is a new, chemical-free cleaning process for the floors of the UWM Children's Center and "phase two" of a natural lawn care project in front of Merrill Hall. If the aeration and composting of that select patch of soil is successful, only a handful of dandelions should pop up this spring.

"If that area is blanketed with dandelions," says UWM Sustainability Coordinator Kate Nelson, "then we'll know this approach may not be effective for campuswide lawn care."

But the results are in for a new floor scrubber that relies on electrically converted water technology to lift dirt, salt and traces of old cleaners off campus floors.

"It works great, is chemical-free and uses less water than conventional floor scrubbers," says Nelson.

New cleaners are being priced and tested as part of a UWM "green cleaning" audit by vendors Kranz and Johnson Diversey, an affiliate of SC Johnson. The goal is to conserve water, utilize more cost-effective cleaning agents and use fewer chemical-based cleaners – including some containing toxic ingredients.

"This audit provides a clear picture of what products and processes we are currently using," explains Dave Danielson, director of Physical Plant Services. "And we'll have an understanding of our inventory, so that we can maximize our efficiencies and understand what it will take to transition to a complete green cleaning program."

## ALL HANDS, AND WHEELS, ON DECK

The audit will be completed in the late spring, but already some Green Seal-certified cleaners have failed

to pass muster because they don't clean as well as conventional cleaners. On the other hand – or every hand – a Green Seal-certified hand soap makes its campuswide debut this spring.

The Facility Services department is also looking at alternatives to the \$20,000 UWM spends yearly on nonrecyclable paper toweling.

Nelson also is seeking federal stimulus dollars to purchase a fleet of electric vehicles for the Facilities staff. A hybrid shuttle could ferry multiple workers from their "base" in the University Services Building just off Capitol Drive to campus daily. Small electric cars could transport them across the East Side campus more efficiently than the university's aging fleet of vehicles powered by compressed natural gas (CNG).

"Older CNG vehicles are very difficult and expensive to maintain," Nelson says.

Also in keeping with the idea that "sustainability is everyone's responsibility," all precooked food scraps from the kitchen in the Sandburg Halls of Residence are donated to Growing Power for Change. This award-winning Milwaukee farm and innovator in urban agriculture uses the scraps to boost its composting efforts.



The Speed Scrub (right) challenged an older detergent-dispensing campus floor scrubber (left). The Speed Scrubber's sustainable cleaning approach, using only ionized water, won the competition and a spot in the university's fleet of more than 20 floor scrubbers. More Speed Scrub models will be added over time.

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