

It was a pleasant May evening. As I was driving home from a tennis meet, I had a peculiar and sobering realization. Peering out of my open window, I could see house after house with most rooms spilling unnecessary light into the 8 pm sunset. Pausing at a stoplight, I could distinguish the sound of air conditioners running in the 65 degree evening. The scene drove the last golden spike into my mission to combat the senseless energy gluttony in this country. My passion to preserve the earth culminated that May evening and within two weeks I had submitted the paperwork to found the Energy Conservation Operation (ECO) at my high school.

The current energy consumption in the United States and the world is not sustainable. Many studies show that global warming, partially caused by consumption of fossil fuels to meet energy demands, is indeed a nightmare realized. However, trying to tackle the entire environmental problem facing civilization would lead to ineffectual jabs at the myriad problems wrapped up into the nebulous idea of the "environmental problem." I brainstormed practical opportunities with other students regarding making an actual impact on the environment. We decided to focus on the conservation of energy, utilizing existing technology, and/or technology that will soon be feasible, rather than theorizing into the future. Existing technology is available, though often underutilized, which could provide leaps in the direction of energy conservation from compact fluorescent (CF) light bulbs to automatic setback home thermostats. By focusing on these readily-available options, the homeowner can begin pushing forward in this effort immediately, and hopefully the King Kong of an energy crisis our civilization faces can be knocked down to a more easily dealt with orangutan.

Following in this direction, the ECO has as its major objective lowering energy consumption within our community by utilizing existing energy saving technology. We have made great strides toward meeting our goal. We accomplished this by first contacting a number of large home improvement stores in Rochester. Working with Home Depot, we received a sizeable donation of CF bulbs. We then sold these bulbs at a discount to Mayo High students and parents to encourage their use, and to promote energy conservation. We anticipate that simply by using the bulbs donated so far we can save our community (according to energystar.gov): \$13,000 over the life-span of the CF bulbs compared to incandescent lighting, 90,000 kWhs of energy, and 140,000 lbs of Carbon emissions. In addition, we are planning a Homeowner's Energy Expo in January, applying for grants to obtain solar panels for Mayo High, and taking steps to become part of a Rochester School District committee designing a new "green" elementary school. In less than four months of operation we have already made a significant impact in the fight against excessive energy consumption, and against the larger environmental problem at hand. I hope that the legacy of this organization perpetuates a new mindset of energy conservation that the country and the world need to embrace.