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Uni Eco-flattening competition draws to a close

The University of Canterbury's annual 'eco-my-flat' competition has now finished, with a high-level judging panel deliberating this week. The judging panel comprises TV sustainability celebrity Te Radar, Christchurch City Councillor Chrissie Williams, the City Council's Sustainability Advisor Tony Moore and the University of Canterbury's Sustainability Advocate Dr Kate Hewson.

The prizes will be awarded this Saturday, World Environment Day, at the University's 'Earth Night' party. They will be presented by Green Party Co-Leader Metiria Turei, M.P.

The organisers agree that the standard this year has been unusually high.

"We've been very surprised by the lengths that some flats have gone to to win the competition and improve their own lives," said Dr Matt Morris, the University's Sustainable Practices Coordinator. "Not only have we seen vegetable gardens going in, better insulation and more biking, but also some excellent, quite technical creativity. This includes home-made cider presses, innovative grey-water systems, native seedling raising and even community-building board games.

"In addition, flats have shared resources between each other, had joint pot-lucks and a fair trade hot chocolate night raising funds for Oxfam. One flat organised a neighbourhood barbecue. This spirit of cooperation and generosity has been one of the most rewarding parts of the competition this year," Dr Morris said.

Students who participate in the competition attend nine 'eco-living' workshops, have their flats audited and keep regular blogs of the changes they have made. Of the initial 27 flats that joined the competition, three months later there are about fifteen still in the competition. "Some flats who have pulled out of the competition are still coming to the workshops, though, just to learn more about how to live more sustainably on a student budget," Dr Morris said.

The winners of the Most Eco'd Up Flat category win a trip to Kaikoura where they stay for three nights and experience many of the great eco-adventures of the town, as well as \$500 off their power bill from Community Energy Action. The winners of the Most Innovative Flat category win a trip to Geraldine staying at an organic farm with some local treats, vouchers for Piko Wholefoods and dinner for the flat at the Lotus Heart Restaurant. There's even a prize for the Most Awesome Landlord, with the winner receiving a free energy check and a case of wine from Yealands Estate.

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