The clock is ticking

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On March 26, we will be switching off the lights inside our iconic clock tower, 'Old Joe'. This switch-off is being undertaken in aid of Earth Hour which encourages people from around the world to switch off their lights for an hour to help ease the effects of global warming. The event run by the World Wildlife Fund aims to raise awareness of the fragility of our planet and how we all have a part to play in reducing the impact of our energy consumption.

At Birmingham we continuously develop ways to help the environment such as our innovative on campus energy saving projects. Our latest project is the construction of a new Steam Main to the University's Medical School from our main campus. The building of this main and its associated bridge will ensure a supply of heat to the medical school which is secure but will also significantly reduce our carbon emissions. A trial will begin in July 2011 and full use is anticipated during the autumn.

Furthering the University's commitment to limiting its impact on the environment, our newly refurbished building Muirhead Tower has a new vitalisation system which will maintain its internal temperature preventing internal overheating or freezing temperatures throughout the year. The building is also currently being installed with 80 energy meters to assist in monitoring energy use. A constant lighting level is maintained in the building during the day as well as corridor and stair lighting being time scheduled, all of which significantly reduces the amount of energy the building uses.

The University is also committed to research in a variety of fields which will help ensure the sustainability of our planet in the future. Currently the University's Institute for Energy Research and Policy is involved in the 'Taking on the Teenagers' project focussing on teenager's attitudes to saving energy and developing ways of changing their habits. With 95% of teenagers having televisions, music systems or phones in their rooms raising awareness within this age group is something that is of increasing concern in the future and is an area of research the University is pioneering.

Furthering our commitment to research into sustainable fuels for the future, Birmingham is the first University in the United Kingdom to run a fleet of five hydrogen powered cars. The University is also home to England's first hydrogen gas fuelling station which is optimised to fuel six cars per day that can then travel up to 100 miles reaching speeds of 50 mph. The cars are virtually silent in operation and completely pollution free. Birmingham's research team have also unveiled a hydrogen fuel cell powered house. The £2-million project is exploring how the fuel cell unit can be used for domestic resources such as electricity, water and central heating, and whether it is a viable alternative to fossil fuels.

For more information on how you can target global warming and get involved with Earth Hour please visit **www.wwf.org.uk/earthhour (http://www.wwf.org.uk/earthhour)** .

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