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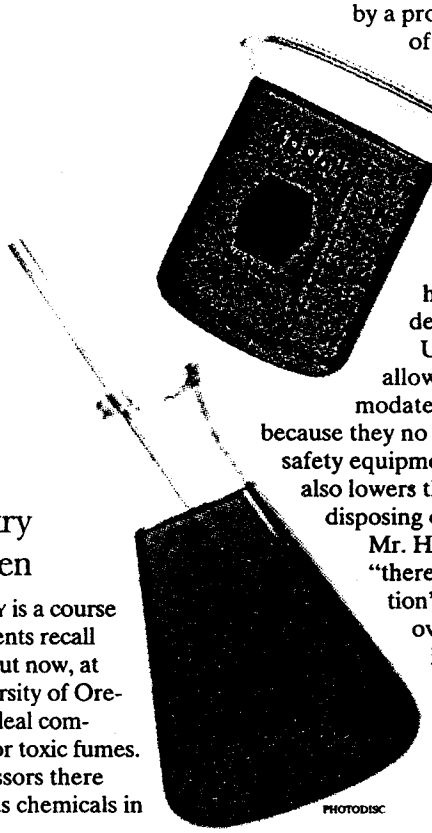
Organic Chemistry Goes for the Green

ORGANIC CHEMISTRY is a course few college students recall with fondness. But now, at least, those at the University of Oregon won't have their ordeal compounded by acid burns or toxic fumes.

Two chemistry professors there have replaced hazardous chemicals in their laboratory with relatively harmless, environmentally friendly ones. This year, 30 of the 260 students enrolled in organic chemistry are conducting their experiments in a "green" lab course. The chemistry department plans to turn all of its organic-chemistry labs green over the next two years.

Jim Hutchison, an assistant professor of chemistry, says the green lab wasn't prompted by environmental concerns, but by a problem of logistics. Because of a limited amount of safety equipment, such as fume hoods, the department had to restrict the number of students in each lab, so some were scheduled late at night and on weekends—times hardly popular among students and professors.



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Using the green curriculum allows the university to accomodate more students in its labs because they no longer require as much safety equipment. The new curriculum also lowers the university's costs for disposing of dangerous wastes.

Mr. Hutchison says that because "there hasn't been much innovation" in organic-lab textbooks over the last 50 years, he and his colleague Ken Doxsee, an associate professor of chemistry, developed their experiments by adapting recently published research. At first, some students in the green lab felt they were being shortchanged, Mr. Hutchison says. But in the end, all were enthusiastic about it.

The two professors now plan to publish a lab manual to help their colleagues at other institutions color their chemistry labs green.

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