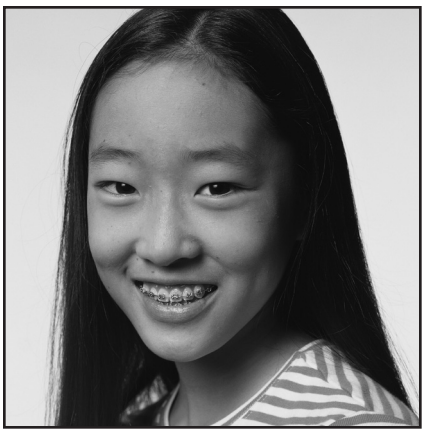
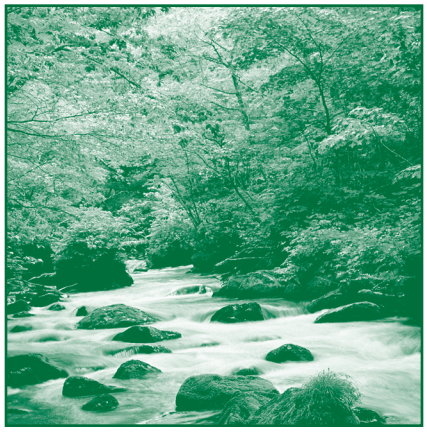
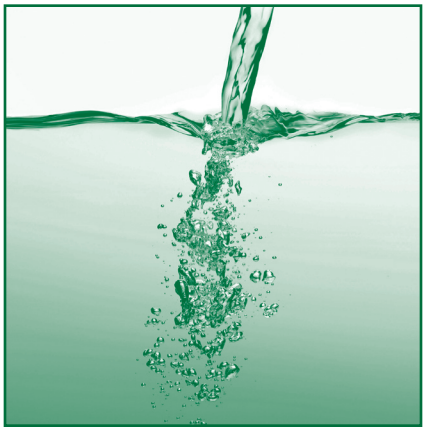
ENVIRONMENTAL CLUBS:

A Guide for South Carolina Schools



A Publication of the
S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's
Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

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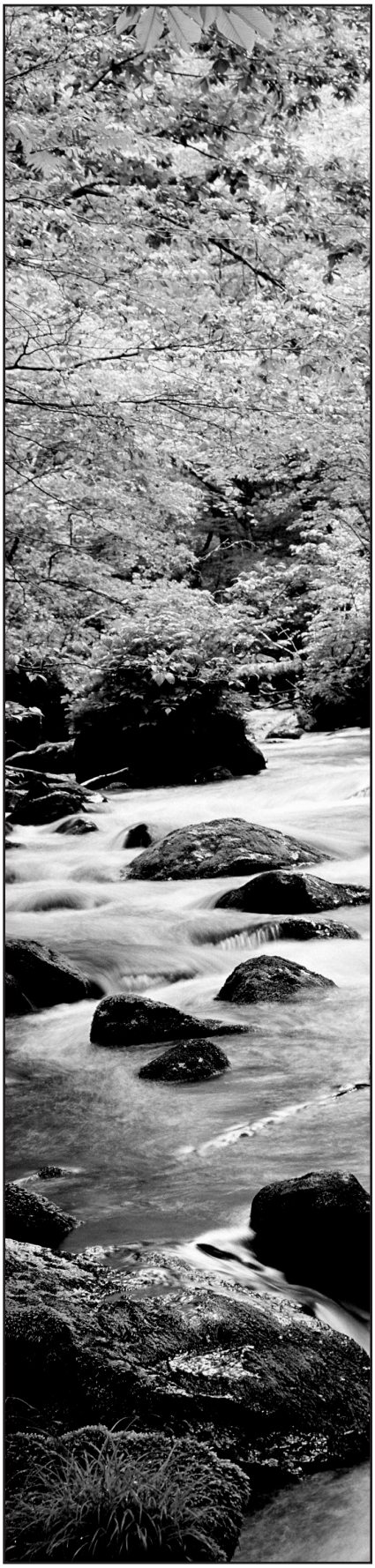

Why offer environmental clubs at school?

South Carolina students can learn about the environment by exploring areas of interest beyond what is offered in the curriculum through participation in an environmental club. Often, it is easy to find students who have an interest in and a concern for the environment. By becoming involved in a club's projects at school and in the community, these students acquire skills to identify, investigate and understand environmental issues. Students learn the concept of community service by working together to make their school, neighborhood, city or county a better place to live and have fun as they explore their environment through service projects. Students also may develop valuable leadership experience through involvement in an environmental club.

"Environmental Clubs: A Guide for South Carolina Schools" – developed by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Office of Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling – offers suggestions and project ideas for teachers and students.

What is the purpose of an environmental club?

Environmental clubs can serve many purposes. Students can gain an understanding of local, state and national environmental issues. Students can work on various projects from setting up a school recycling program to marking storm drains to stop illegal dumping of motor oil and other fluids to developing an anti-idling campaign to help improve air quality on campus. And students can learn skills from participation in meaningful activities that remind them of a personal responsibility that influences their behavior and attitudes as well as shows them how to lead by example. Listed below are just a few examples of mission statements from school environmental clubs across the country.

The mission of the environmental club is to:

- provide students with the opportunity to learn more about their surroundings and participate in service projects at school and in the community;
- promote environmental awareness and develop social and life skills;
- increase student awareness of environmental issues and give them the ability to make a change;
- provide opportunities for students to become directly involved in a variety of projects relating to the environment; or
- promote awareness of environmental issues and the responsibility and opportunity each of us have to make a difference.

Perhaps your environmental club can use one (or a combination) of these mission statements or create its own. The mission statement will help guide club activities and may be adjusted over time.

How do you organize an environmental club?

There are several steps to organizing an environmental club at school.

1. Know your school and community.

Determine what other environmental groups may exist in your community and what support they may be able to offer your environmental club. Identify major environmental issues at your school or within the community. For example, does your school have a recycling program?

2. Present your idea to school administration.

Write a proposal outlining the environmental club's purpose and mission and present it to faculty and administration.

3. Plan for the basic structure of your organization.

Depending on the level of interest, the environmental club may start with a small, but dedicated team of students and faculty. This will allow the group to establish its structure (e.g., when to meet, how often).

4. Recruit members.

There will be different reasons for different students to get involved. It may be a graduation requirement, for extra credit or to be a part of something that positively impacts the environment. To encourage students to sign up, use posters, table tents on cafeteria tables and morning announcements.

5. Hold a kick-off meeting.

The first meeting is important as it gathers together all who are interested. One of the group's organizers should give a brief overview of what the club could strive to accomplish (e.g., purpose, projects). This meeting also could be used to brainstorm potential activities and projects for the group. See "Project Ideas" on page 5 for suggestions. Prior to the meeting, it may be helpful to survey teachers and students to discover what projects and topics generate the most interest. If possible, provide food and drinks at the kick-off meeting, but remember to minimize the amount of waste generated.

6. Schedule meetings.

Have meetings on a regular schedule (i.e., the same day and time) at least once a month. Students should leave feeling that they have learned something, accomplished something, made progress on a project or all three. At the first "official" meeting after the kick-off, finalize the proposed organizational structure and club

'Green' Web Sites

- **Green Steps Schools** recognizes schools in South Carolina that take annual sustainable steps toward becoming more environmentally responsible. Visit **www.greenstepschools.com** to learn more. Even if a school chooses not to participate, the project list offers many ideas for possible club efforts.
- **PalmettoPride** is a litter prevention organization to clean South Carolina through four main focus areas: education; enforcement; awareness; and pickup. Visit **http://palmettopride.org** to learn how your club can get involved and potential grant opportunities.
- **The S.C. Department of Natural Resources** has an array of resources for teachers and students. For details, visit **www.dnr.sc.gov/education/tr.html**.
- **The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** provides a Web site specifically for students on a variety of environmental topics. Visit **www.epa.gov/students**.
- **Yes!** is a non-profit organization that connects, inspires and collaborates with change makers for a sustainable way of life for all. Visit **www.yesworld.org**.

name as well as plan for the election of officers. Distribute the list of potential activities and projects generated at the kick-off meeting and select those that the group will focus on first. These may vary from year to year although there may be core projects that continue every year. If you have enough volunteers, students' duties can be rotated every six or nine weeks to increase participation. The work can get dirty and tiring, but for motivated students, faculty, staff and community members that get involved, the rewards are worth it.

7. Promote your club.

Advertising club activities not only keeps members as well as other students, faculty and staff informed, but it promotes an awareness of environmental issues. Advertising gives your environmental club visibility and provides recognition to students involved in worthwhile activities. Promote your club in the yearbook, newspaper and newsletter. You also may create posters, send news releases to your local newspaper or radio station as well as send memos to the school board, administration and staff. Design T-shirts that are only worn by members on meeting days or at club events.

8. Organize funding for club projects and activities.

Unless your club receives sufficient funding as part of the school's budget, you will need to seek funding to carry out the activities of the club. Club dues and student fees for field trips may be necessary, especially for newly formed clubs. Another option is fund raising which can take many forms such as: the sale of recycled-content T-shirts or reusable cups; holding a yard or garage sale of "reused" items; and making things to sell such as birdhouses, bird feeders, greeting cards, stationery and cloth shopping bags.

Calendar of Events

Each year, the calendar is filled with state and national celebrations that may fit with an environmental club's mission. Designate your own cleanup day, plant a tree or find another way to commemorate the environment. Get involved with one of the following celebrations.

- **EARTH DAY** is a day when millions of people across the world come together to promote a cleaner, safer environment. It is celebrated on April 22 each year and many events are held both locally and nationally. To learn more, visit **www.epa.gov/earthday**.
- **BEACH SWEEP/RIVER SWEEP** is South Carolina's largest one-day volunteer cleanup event of its kind. Every third Saturday in September, thousands of South Carolinians clear beaches, rivers, lakes, marshes and swamps of debris. The cleanup has taken place annually since 1988. Visit **www.scseagrant.org/content/?cid=49** to learn more.
- **AMERICA RECYCLES DAY** (ARD), November 15, is the only nationally recognized day dedicated to encouraging Americans to recycle. ARD has grown to include millions of Americans pledging to improve their recycling habits at home, school and work as well as to buy recycled-content products. To learn more, visit **http://americarecyclesday.org**.
- **ARBOR DAY** has been a national day of celebration for more than 125 years. The day is designed to encourage tree planting, caring for trees and learning their value. In South Carolina, it is celebrated the first Friday in December. Visit **www.arborday.org/states/state.cfm?state=sc** to learn more.
- **NATIONAL DRINKING WATER WEEK** is celebrated the first week in May. Celebrations and educational events are held by communities, organizations and companies across the country. Get more information at **http://water.epa.gov/drink/drinkingwaterweek/**.
- **NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK** is celebrated in April nationwide with a different theme each year. For more information, visit **www.nwf.org/wildlife/activities/national-wildlife-week.aspx**.
- **THE GREAT AMERICAN CLEANUP** – held each spring – offers communities an opportunity to refresh their surroundings by cleaning up, planting, rebuilding and renewing. For details, visit Keep America Beautiful at **www.kab.org/site/PageServer?pagename=gac_landing**.

Project Ideas

Selecting activities and projects for the environmental club are one of the most important steps in determining the club's success. Some activities are more likely to interest students and increase involvement, while others may lead to greater environmental benefits. Some ideas are provided below.

- **Create a campus nature trail.**
- **Write environmental tips for the school newspaper.**
- **Create a skit, slide show or video for the morning announcements.**
- **Look for ways to conserve water on campus.**
- **Set up debates on environmental issues** (e.g., global warming, producer responsibility, mining).
- **Have guest speakers address the club or entire school.**
- **Add the environmental club's projects to the school's Web site.**
- **Create a short video clip or public service announcement on a key environmental issue.**
- **Hold "theme days"** (e.g., zero-waste lunch day, walk to school day).
- **Looks for ways to save energy on campus.**
- **Work with the school or community library to establish an environmental sciences section.**
- **Begin or enhance school or community recycling programs.**
- **Host community cleanup days or other service projects.**
- **Start an on-site composting program using food scraps from the school cafeteria.**
- **Coordinate environmental field trips.**
- **Establish gardens, ponds or trees on campus.** Flowers grown could be taken to hospitals or nursing homes.
- **Communicate with the community and school board members about the importance of school or district-wide recycling programs.**
- **Patrol campus for trash.**
- **Participate in an adopt-a-species, adopt-a-trail or adopt-a-highway program.**
- **Collect and distribute indoor plants to improve classroom air quality.**
- **Implement anti-idling policies at your school for buses, cars and delivery vehicles.** Purchase and install "no idling" signs around campus reinforcing the anti-idling policy.
- **Implement a storm drain marking program to raise awareness about non-point source pollution.**
- **Install a rain garden or rain barrel at your school.** Include an outreach campaign encouraging the same practices at home.
- **Work with 4-H or other youth development organizations that have science or the environment as a focus.**
- **Run a school store filled with recycled-content or reusable items to raise money for environmental club projects.**
- **Host an environmental career day.**

Resources from DHEC

DHEC can help any K-12 public or private school set up, maintain and expand recycling programs through technical assistance, educational material and grant funding. The Office provides hands-on technical assistance (e.g., finding markets, providing information on bins and containers) to start or improve recycling programs as well as posters, signage and other material.

DHEC offers "Action for a cleaner tomorrow: A South Carolina Environmental Curriculum Supplement" ("Action"). Developed by teachers and DHEC in conjunction with the S.C. Department of Education, "Action" can serve as a starting point for introducing environmental education in the classroom. The award-winning, activity-based interdisciplinary curriculum supplement is correlated to the state's science standards. "Action" is only available as part of a FREE training provided by DHEC. For details, call **1-800-768-7348**. In addition, DHEC's "Action in the Classroom" provides fifth- and seventh-grade as well as high school students an overview of recycling, buying recycled, waste reduction, reuse and landfill disposal in South Carolina.

DHEC's Recycling Education Grant Program provides funding – when available – to any K-12, public or private school or school district. The funding may be used for recycling containers, composting projects as well as supplies to support "Action" lessons and school recycling or environmental clubs.

Take Action Today Awards

Each year, DHEC recognizes innovative and successful school recycling, composting, waste reduction and reuse programs as well as a recycling teacher of the year.

Call **1-800-768-7348** for details.

Grant Funding Opportunities

Check out these Web sites for potential grant funding.

- **www.scdhec.gov/HomeAndEnvironment/K12SchoolsStudentsTeachers/ContestsGrants/ChampionsoftheEnvironment/ApplicationForm/**
- **www.scdhec.gov/HomeAndEnvironment/K12SchoolsStudentsTeachers/ContestsGrants/K12RecyclingGrant/**
- **http://palmettopride.org/grants-center**

Additional Guides Available ...

In addition to this environmental club guide, there are two additional publications that may assist in your school's sustainability efforts – "Recycling: A Guide for South Carolina Schools" and "Composting: A Guide for South Carolina Schools." Both are available at **www.scdhec.gov/recycle** or by calling **1-800-768-7348**.

Printed on **RECYCLED-CONTENT** Paper CR-011017 7/17