



Environmental Education Improves Our Everyday Lives

Environmental Education Helps Ensure the Health and Welfare of Our Nation By:*

- Protecting human health
- Advancing quality education
- Creating jobs in the environmental field
- Promoting environmental protection along with economic development
- Encouraging stewardship of natural resources



Protecting Human Health

The link between environmental challenges and human health is a major cause of public concern about the environment. Lead poisoning from paint and pipes, air pollution, pesticides in water and food supplies, increased threats of skin cancer from depletion of the ozone layer, and other environmental and health issues are of growing concern to Americans, especially effects on children and future generations. Environmental education can help prevent or mitigate environmental human health problems by providing the public with information on the causes of environmental pollution, how pollutants may affect health, how to assess real versus exaggerated risks, and how to make informed and responsible decisions that prevent or mitigate the effects of pollution on health.

Advancing Quality Education

Educators and public officials generally believe that improvements are needed in the nation's public education system to enhance student learning. Many educational scholars and practitioners agree that students are not doing well at thinking, reasoning, analyzing, or problem-solving. Many goals of education reform emphasize the need to strengthen core subjects such as math, science, and geography; teach across subject areas; improve critical-thinking and problem-solving skills; and relate learning in the classroom to the needs and issues of the community. Environmental education has a tremendous potential to contribute to these goals of education reform. For example, it can strengthen teaching in many core subjects, especially science, because science is the basis for solving many of our environmental challenges. At the same time, environmental education can promote interdisciplinary teaching because environmental topics can be addressed from many different perspectives, including scientific, historical, and cultural.

Environmental education can also bring local environmental challenges into the classroom to improve analysis and problem-solving skills.

* This discussion is adapted from the National Environmental Education Advisory Council's "Report Assessing Environmental Education in the U.S. and the Implementation of the National Environmental Education Act," 1996 (EPA-171-F-96-001). Obtain a free copy of the report by contacting the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information at 800-490-9198 or order on line at <<http://www.epa.gov/ncepihom/orderpubs.html>>. The document also can be viewed on line at EPA's Office of Environmental Education World Wide Web site at <<http://www.epa.gov/enviroed>>.

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Creating Jobs in the Environmental Field

Protecting the environment creates new jobs for Americans. Employment opportunities in the environmental field cover the spectrum of careers from manual labor to high technology and management. For example, there is an increasing demand for individuals with specialized scientific and technical skills to develop more effective pollution prevention and control technologies in areas such as air pollution control, environmental energy sources, hazardous waste management, resource recovery, and instrument manufacturing. Environmental education and training can help ensure an adequate supply of well-trained environmental personnel to deal with the nation's increasingly complex environmental challenges. Environmental education's emphasis on critical-thinking and problem-solving skills equip learners in dealing with rapidly changing technologies in the workplace. Environmental education also opens new economic opportunities as the U.S. exports environmental skills and technologies to other nations.

Promoting Environmental Protection Along With Economic Development

Our future depends on the ability to use the Earth's resources sustainably. The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainable development poses two fundamental education challenges. One is to promote informed decisions that are conducive to sustainability. The other is to teach the benefits of integrating conservation with the need for economic development. Environmental education contributes to sustainable development efforts by demonstrating ways to promote informed decisionmaking and teach the benefits of linking conservation and economic development. Environmental education research has identified key strategies for developing education programs that lead to responsible decisionmaking, and practitioners have developed program models for incorporating a range of perspectives into the resolution of issues. These educational tools and strategies can be applied to efforts to ensure sustainable development.

Encouraging Stewardship of Natural Resources

Interest in protecting America's natural resources, including species and their habitats, arises from the respect most Americans hold for our nation's past and a belief in its future. This interest also stems from a strong desire to protect and enjoy nature and to pass it on to our children. There is a need to increase understanding that the health of individual species can be strong indicators of the health of the entire environment and that biological diversity has ecological and economic importance. Environmental education enhances the public's understanding of the need for healthy plant and animal life and biodiversity. It also educates the public about how their actions affect natural ecosystems and how positive steps taken to minimize impacts on these ecosystems will translate into improvements in our overall environment.



For additional information, visit the World Wide Web at

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