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Envirothon is New York's largest high school environmental education program



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May 7, 6:53 AM Long Island Marketing and Communications Examiner Mike Virgintino

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With global warming, recycling, wildlife protection, polluted water and many other environmental conservation issues increasingly receiving worldwide attention, more people have become more aware about the importance of environmental stewardship.

Many individuals, groups and corporate teams already participate in a variety of programs that include municipal recycling, volunteer opportunities with wildlife organizations and local programs that clean and monitor beaches, streams and parks. Even teenagers, with all that they seem to pile onto their plates from concerns over grades to sports practices to social gatherings, have found time to champion environmental causes. Many even take their interest in the environment to the next level, studying conservation issues and participating in a North American high school competition that tests their knowledge about protecting the world's resources.

High School Envirothon

In New York, teenagers become involved with the New York State Envirothon. This competition, first introduced during 1990, is managed by the New York State Soil & Water Conservation Districts. It is part of the larger North American Envirothon competition, an environmental education program that involves student teams in most U.S. states and Canadian provinces. The Envirothon teaches and tests students about natural resources. It also cultivates their desire to learn more about environmental issues that affect family, government and commercial decisions.

The Envirothon program has a variety of ways to reach students. Within some school districts, the program is incorporated into high school science curriculum. It also is available to students through after-school programs, school clubs, or home school programs. It can be adopted by non-school groups, too, such as 4-H Clubs, scouts, or other teenage organizations.

The Envirothon is coordinated throughout North America with well-defined lesson plans that incorporate the study of forestry, wildlife, aquatics and soils. A specific and changing contemporary issue, such as a water resources problem, is incorporated into the lesson plan each year.

Local Study, Competition Comes First

School and organization outreach in each New York county includes introductory letters issued

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during the fall to explain the competition to teachers and advisors. Follow-up is handled with post cards, e-mails and phone calls throughout the school year. Updated details always can be found on the state Envirothon web site.

Within the state, and across North America, teen teams that consist of five students are organized at high schools and other teen programs. During the school year, each team studies the lessons and practices its oral presentation to prepare to compete locally against similar teams. Winners of these local competitions then compete on state/provincial levels to earn the honor to represent a state/province in the North American finals.

In New York, each county Soil and Water Conservation District coordinates the first step of the competition. Some counties organize autonomously, while some coordinate competition on a regional level. The competition, which can be a full day or a two-day program, involves field work, research, written tests and oral presentations. The tests and presentations are timed and judged by local teachers, scientists and natural resources experts.

The [Environmental Education Foundation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts](#) is the primary fundraising resource for the New York Envirothon. It is responsible for the donations, sponsorships and other kinds of support for the competition that are obtained from state-based foundations, businesses, environmental organizations and government entities.

Long Island and NYC Events

On Long Island, the counties of Nassau and Suffolk cooperate to hold the local competition on the same day at the same location, with a top team selected from each county. The location of the one-day competition alternates between Nassau and Suffolk sites. This year, 42 teams, doubling last year's total, competed during late April at the Usdan Center for Creative and Performing in the Suffolk community of Wheatley Heights.

Expectations among Long Island teams always are high as each one wants to duplicate the achievement of the 2004 team from the Nassau community of Farmingdale. That team captured the state title and then traveled to West Virginia to compete in the finals.

For New York City, teams from its five boroughs collectively gather in one location during each April for its one-day event. The competition is sponsored by utility Con Edison and the location rotates annually among the boroughs. Each borough has a designated top team at the end of the day's competition. The number of teams in NYC has averaged 20-25 during the past several years.

While most of the NYC teams are affiliated with public schools, teams from private and religious schools increasingly have entered the competition. More than 500 schools in the city are eligible to participate each year and the Envirothon is one of the few opportunities for NYC students to learn about natural resources within the five boroughs. Since many students have spent most of their young lives within an urbanized environment, an educational opportunity such as the Envirothon competition encourages significant interaction with nature.

State Champs and North American Finals

The New York State competition is held during late May or early June. This year's New York State Envirothon will be held at Keuka College in Keuka Park (Finger Lakes Region) on June 2-3. The team left standing from among the 40+ competing county champs will have the honor to represent New York State at the North American finals in California this August.

The future of the environment appears to be in good hands. More than a thousand New York high school students compete for the state's environmental team title each year. From the first day of the program, each student understands that, if his or her team captures the New York Envirothon title, the summer will be dedicated to environmental studies and another round of competition. They also know that their hard work could result in a significant contribution to conservation science.

New York State Envirothon for High School Students



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