

# Chicago students take on medicine disposal in IISG-Earth Force partnership

As middle school students get to the age where personal appearance becomes an ever-pressing concern, many increase their use of products such as hair-spray, body wash, and moisturizer. However, personal-care products and medicines can be harmful if they are disposed of incorrectly and end up in local water sources. To educate and empower Chicago students to help address this environmental issue, IISG is working with Windy City Earth Force, a non-profit program through the Field Museum, focused on schools in the Calumet region.

“We are encouraging students to explore the effects that personal-care products and pharmaceuticals have on our watersheds,” said Angie Viands, Field Museum community conservation specialist.

The students use a six-step, problem-solving process to create an environmentally-focused project. Steps include gathering information about environmental assets and issues, selecting a policy or community practice to change, and creating and carrying out a plan for action.

“We are delighted to work with Earth Force educators Angie Viands and Kirk Anne Taylor, who incorporate an exemplary service-learning model and involve Chicago public school teachers through their established network,” said Robin Goettel, IISG associate director of education. “The community outreach that resulted from student-developed stewardship projects was quite effective in getting the sensible disposal message to the public.”

Students from Niños Héroes Elementary focused on the negative effects of medicines and personal-care products in our waters after Goettel and Terri Hallesy, IISG education specialist, talked to teacher Laura Senteno’s combined 7th- and 8th-grade class. The students made posters and fliers, gave presentations to other students, and created a public service announcement.

Senteno said the students appreciated the hands-on nature of the program, as well as the freedom to choose the topic. “Everything was generated from the students. No textbooks or lectures—just their ideas,” she said, adding that she plans on continuing to work with IISG and Windy City Earth Force. “I don’t see how teach-

ers couldn’t get involved in this. There are so many resources available. To me, that is a big deal, because typically it isn’t easy to find them.”

Students at George M. Pullman Elementary School took steps to educate others about the proper disposal of medicines. The youth created an informational banner, made educational brochures, and spoke to the local school council and students.

“Students find this issue very interesting because many of them have not heard of or ever thought about it,” Viands said. “Last year’s class was really concerned about personal-care products because the students are in a stage in their life where they are using them.”

The partnership between IISG and Windy City Earth Force is supported through 2012 by the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. “We cannot wait to see what exciting projects are developed by teachers and students in the next year of our project,” Goettel said.



Angie Viands, Field Museum community conservation specialist, teaches George M. Pullman Elementary School students about the community stewardship process.