



Time For Action*

Activity H.d

GRADE LEVELS: 9 - 12

OBJECTIVE:

To help students understand the process of taking environmental action and to help them develop a plan to get involved in a community problem. Have students identify a specific waste management problem in their community, design research questions to address it, conduct the research and decide how and whether to take action to help solve the problem.

MATERIALS:

newspaper
telephone
resource people
i.e., Department of Public Works
Planning Department
Recycling Coordinator
Environmental Management Council
Department of Health

VOCABULARY:

Environmental Management Council, Planning Department

BACKGROUND:

Living in a democratic society, we have many opportunities to get involved in our community. However, few people know how to get involved and make a difference with their suggestions. In this investigation, students will learn about the key environmental actors and how they can fit in to the decision-making process.

PROCEDURE:

1. What are several key solid waste management issues in your community? Find out about them by reading local newspapers, attending meetings of solid waste planning groups, talking to municipal or state solid waste managers, finding out the viewpoints of local environmental groups or reviewing local budgets for hauling and disposing of trash.
2. Select a local waste issue to investigate individually or as part of a small group. Focus on an issue that can be investigated within a reasonable amount of time. Topics for investigation:
How can you reduce the amount of waste you produce?
 - a. What steps could you take to reduce the amount of solid waste you make at home?
 - b. How can people be informed about changing their buying and living habits to reduce the

amount of waste they dispose of?

c. How do various restaurants compare in what and how much waste they generate?

If you have a recycling plant:

a. How much waste has to be disposed of in an incinerator or landfill?

b. What are some of the pollution problems associated with recycling?

c. How could recycling rates be increased in your community?

If you have an incinerator:

a. How much reduction is achieved by burning?

b. Discuss any political or environmental problem the community has confronted.

c. Is incinerating waste for energy an economically and environmentally sound management option?

If you have a landfill:

a. What can be done if the local landfill is almost full?

b. Is methane gas a problem in the landfill? What are possible solutions?

c. How much water falls on a landfill during the year? How much of this becomes runoff and leachate? Find out how leachate is managed. How often are leachate collection tanks pumped at different times of the year?

d. What are the pollutants in leachate? What are the sources of these pollutants? Which are the most harmful?

3. Define your issue as precisely as possible; develop a research question(s) and conduct the research to answer your question. Possible research techniques for collecting data to help answer your question could include telephone interviews, development and use of surveys and questionnaires, and use of both primary and secondary references.
4. Prepare a research report to present in class. The report should include a description of :
 - a. the issue
 - b. the research question
 - c. the method of investigation
 - d. the data gathered
 - e. how you analyzed the data
 - f. what conclusion you made from the study (both the knowledge gained and what value that knowledge has)
 - g. what concepts, values and beliefs influenced why you asked the question, why you selected the research method, and how you interpreted the results.

You may want to speak or interview the following people for information:

Town Supervisor

Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Environmental Conservation

Department of Public Works

Local Health Department

Recycling Coordinator

Environmental groups

League of Women Voters
Cooperative Extension Agent
Environmental Management Council

FOLLOW-UP:

Questions to consider as you investigate your issue and before you decide to take action include:

- a. Who is involved in the issue and what are their beliefs, values, and attitudes?
- b. What are my beliefs and values on this issue?
- c. What specific types of action will I take? (persuasive, consumer, political, legal, direct, and/or personal action)
- d. Is there sufficient evidence to warrant action on this issue?
- e. Are there alternative actions that I could take?
- f. What are the legal, social, and economic consequences of this action?
- g. Do my personal values support this action?
- h. Do I understand the procedures necessary to take this action?
- i. Do I have the skills necessary to take this action?
- j. Do I have the courage to take this action?
- k. Do I have the time needed to take this action?
- l. Do I have all the other resources needed to make this action effective?
- m. What are the ecological consequences of this action?

If you decide to take action, choose strategies for which there is a likelihood of success within a realistic amount of time. For example:

Survey litter production on your block, instead of surveying litter production in your entire town.

Add a conclusion to your report that describes the action you took and any results.

Speak to community groups about your findings. Write an article or letter to the newspaper about your findings.

*Source: Cornell Waste Management Institute Trash Goes to School