

The National High School Climate Forum



November 2021 Newsletter

**“We are not drowning, we are fighting”
- Pacific Youth Rallying Cry before the
COP26 Summit**

What is the National High School Climate Forum?

The National High School Climate Forum was established in 2020 to foster an exchange of ideas between student environmental leaders at high schools across the country. We accomplish our mission through our communications, speaker events, and our annual NHSCF Youth Summit which takes place in May of each year. Our monthly newsletters represent our primary communications related to fostering an exchange of ideas. Each NHSCF newsletter contains sustainability tips, information related to extracurricular environmental programs, links to interesting environmental articles, and, most importantly, written descriptions of the various initiatives taking place at our member schools. In addition to these newsletters, we host monthly Delegation Meetings dedicated to discussing environmental issues in a live setting. The National High School Climate Forum is committed to climate education, as well, and, as such, we host speaker events on different topics twice a year. Our two 2020-2021 events were dedicated to wildfires and sustainability on college campuses, respectively. Finally, our annual youth summit provides students with the opportunity to present their work for the rest of the forum and concludes each NHSCF year. With this in mind, we are excited to have you and your school in the forum this year and can't wait to see what we can accomplish!

NHSCF Fall 2021 Speaker Event Recap

Storm Surge: Attributing Natural Disasters to Climate Change

On November 10th, 2021, from 7-8pm ET, the National High School Climate Forum hosted our Fall 2021 Speaker Event, titled ***Storm Surge: Attributing Natural Disasters to Climate Change***. The event consisted of presentations by our two speakers: **Mr. Craig McLean**, Acting Chief Scientist of NOAA, and **Dr. Greg Holland**, Emeritus Director for the Capacity Center for Climate and Weather Extremes, followed by Q&A. Mr. McLean and Dr. Holland not only discussed how natural disasters are related to climate change specifically, but also addressed broader questions related to climate, discussed the roles of their organizations, and provided an overview of their career paths, as well as opportunities for students to get involved in some of their organizations' initiatives. The event concluded with discussing some of the difficulties related to achieving the world's current climate goals, as outlined at COP26, and made clear the tremendous importance of youth (like you in the forum!) of taking up the torch in regards to continuing to fight these issues in the future. We hope that all of you in attendance at the event enjoyed it and learned a lot and we hope that those of you who were unable to attend will watch the recording below. Remember: Your initiatives make a difference and it will ultimately be up to all of us to continue this fight in the decades to come!

Here is the Link to the Webinar Recording:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EA8tDluwljezTlspH1T9ulvvJ3r_T84/view?usp=sharing

NHSCF November Sustainability Tips

1. Holiday Lighting Fixes

The constant usage of holiday lighting leads to wasteful burning of natural resources which increases greenhouse gas emissions. Don't waste energy by leaving tree lights and other decorative lighting powered on throughout the entire night: unplug, instead! Continue conserving energy by reducing outdoor lighting displays or even replacing traditional holiday lights with LED holiday lights. LED lights use 95% less energy, last longer, and cost less than their counterparts. Another option includes putting your lights on timers, so that they operate independently. This year, remember to reduce the harmful effects of holiday lighting and start unplugging!



2. Picking the Right Type of Tree

Plastic trees are made from the burning of fossil fuels which speed up climate change. Even though these trees are often reused, once thrown out the plastic leaches toxic chemicals in landfills. Although one would expect buying a live tree to be a greater burden on the environment, the process of growing these trees actually contributes to positive air quality and these trees can be recycled into mulch each year. Real trees are often locally grown which prevents excess air pollution and also supports local businesses. Try potting and repotting trees to reuse them for several years, surpassing the benefits of fake trees, as well.



3. Wrapping Paper Alternatives

Half of American paper consumption each year is used to wrap gifts, with the waste totalling to over 4 million tons. Ways to avoid this mass waste is to reuse wrapping paper or use fabric gift bags. Another alternative is to use environmentally friendly wrapping paper, such as those made from hemp fibers or recycled paper. Avoid using excess tape to save possible reusable paper and also avoid using glossy foil or metallic paper which can be difficult to recycle.



Outside Environmental Programs



Maine Coast Semester at Chewonki- Maine, U.S.A.

The Maine Coast Semester at Chewonki takes place on a 400-acre private peninsula in midcoast Maine, and challenges students with academic coursework on a range of topics, in addition to living more sustainably. Maine Coast Semester forces students to use the natural world as a classroom and to engage in efforts to learn from, as well as protect it. You can learn more about the program here:

<https://mainecoastsemester.chewonki.org/>

Sea Education Association Semester Program

“SEA Semester® provides an experiential opportunity to gather firsthand knowledge that will influence students’ lifelong relationships with the ocean. As our society becomes more aware of how integral the oceans are to the planet, from climate patterns to energy production to the origins of life itself, we must also understand how to conserve these important resources. Moving beyond the textbook toward practical application, hands-on research, and personal experience, SEA Semester prepares students to take a more active role in solving today’s environmental problems”. You can learn more about the program here:

https://www.sea.edu/about_sea/why_sea



NHSCF Announcements

1. Please keep your eyes open for announcements related to our December 2021 Delegate Meeting!
2. Please review the prizes and requirements for the NHSCF Sustainability Competition!
3. Make sure to join the NHSCF Slack Channel! We will be posting new items on the channel everyday starting next week!
4. If you are not a member of the Writing Subcommittee but are interested in contributing something to our November Newsletter, please reach out to Alex at abnoviello23@lawrenceville.org. Also, please send along any sustainability-related publications your school writes so that we can share them with the forum!

Spotlight School Sustainability Initiatives

Each NHSCF newsletter features written descriptions of a variety of sustainability or environmental initiatives taking place at a select group of our member schools. These descriptions are meant to provide the whole of the forum with ideas for initiatives and/or projects going forward and really represent, in our opinion, the most important aspect of these newsletters. Enjoy!

“The Bush School’s COP26”

By: Elise Lombardi ‘2023, The Bush School, WA

The COP 26 international climate conference saw the gathering of delegates from across the globe come together to discuss the climate crisis. The Paris Agreement was created at COP 21, a legally binding treaty to reduce global warming to below two degrees celsius. This year, the delegates discussed and evaluated each country’s progress in the Paris Agreement and made plans to further accomplish those goals. Although, the world is not where it should be with the Paris Agreement, with each country facing different challenges in attempting to stop global warming. Not one country’s temperature has dropped to two degrees, though some have made more progress than others.

In a Green Committee meeting, the leaders briefed club members on this current event and directed them to a source that went more in-depth. The Climate Action Tracker (<https://climateactiontracker.org/>) is a user-friendly website that displays all sorts of climate information and statistics, but most prominently it features a color-coded map of the Paris Agreement. Each country’s coloring represents how well they are following the Paris Agreement. Even more in-depth, if a country is clicked on, there is tons of information in a “country profile” about what aspects of the country are inhibiting progress, such as economics or politics.

Club members then got into small groups and chose prominent countries they wanted to “represent” in the mock conference. Without being disrespectful or culturally appropriating in any way, club members were supposed to reflect, backed up with research, on the biggest factors limiting countries from achieving two degrees celsius. Additionally, they were asked to develop strategies to help get their country to abide by the Paris Agreement in response to the challenges researched. There were four groups, with the countries Nepal, Russia, China, and Australia being represented. Each group dove into their research and was surprisingly excited and engaged by the activity. It was inspiring to see young people diligently focused on the same issues international leaders are debating in Sweden. Also, they seemed to have some fun. The leaders stressed that their “solutions” did not have to be super realistic, thinking out of the box was encouraged. For example, Australia’s “representatives” brought up cattle farming emissions, while Nepal’s suggested that everyone who enters/exits the country must plant a tree.

These creative and imaginative solutions might not apply to the Paris Agreement and the topics discussed at COP 26, but it was a hands-on way to get young people in Green Committee involved in current climate news that often gets brushed over.

“Ongoing Initiatives at MKA”

By: Julia Narucki ‘2023, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

Montclair Kimberley Academy’s Environmental Action Club, also known as EnAct, is coming back strong, hoping to make up for a difficult hybrid year. This year, they have chosen recycling and waste as their focus. They sold fried oreos at their homecoming booth to raise money to order recycling boxes. From Terracycle, these boxes allow students to recycle things that aren’t normally recyclable. If all goes well, this will kick off the week students return from winter break. In keeping with the recycling and waste theme, students have also put up posters on what is acceptable to be put in the recycling bins, as well as what needs to be cleaned before being recycled.



Another initiative that has been consistent for several weeks is a weekly newsletter sent out to students, with contributions from EnAct members. Members who choose to participate find an article having to do with the environment and summarize it to make the contents of the article more accessible to students.

At the start of November, some EnAct members helped harvest beets and carrots from the school’s green roof, which were brought to the cafeteria as a contribution to the day’s lunch. Most recently, the club sent out a list of suggestions for students on ways they can be more sustainable during the holidays.

Another group at MKA, the Carbon Neutrality Commitment Committee, includes AP Environmental Science students as well as EnAct’s club leaders and is working to get MKA to commit to carbon neutrality. One of their main missions is to get the student body behind the idea, and they are starting by trying to get students thinking more about the environment and climate change. In the past, they have educated students and faculty about solar power and gotten many to sign a petition for solar panels. Environmental action at MKA has been in the background for a long time, but EnAct and the CNCC will be working hard this year to change that!

“The Beginning of Bokashi”

By: Amy Choi ‘2023, The Meadows School, NV

When implementing programs such as composting, education proves a necessary step in the process: students and teachers should know what goes in the bins, for instance. However, in the future, schools and other places too could be able to decompose all types of food, including meat and dairy, through bokashi. Bokashi, a Japanese method of decomposition, involves using microbes in order to break down primarily all types of food waste, and is a method that The Meadows School eventually hopes to implement.

The first step toward starting bokashi is similar to composting: conducting a waste audit, and buying a properly sized bin. Next would be buying the bokashi “bran,” which will introduce microbes into the food scraps. Typically, the bacteria used are either yeasts, ones that can produce lactic acids, or non-sulfur bacteria. Unlike composting, these bacteria make it so that bokashi is an anaerobic process, meaning “without air.” One of the key features is keeping the waste compressed and in an airtight container. A feasible way to carry this out throughout your schools would be to collect the food scraps with the bins, and have a separate area where the bran can be added to ferment it.



The initial cost may seem daunting, or people are maybe hesitant to invest in bokashi bran, but the results might change their mind. Composting takes a long time to produce viable fertilizer, around 6 months if done correctly, but bokashi can do so in only 4 weeks. It’s pest free, can be done indoors, simple to set up, and lastly, appeals to students who would otherwise find sorting their food a little tiring.

What happens to the bokashi? Can it be used as fertilizer? Is it too acidic? The bokashi liquid is a viable fertilizer, but the actual mix itself has around a pH of 4, whereas composting usually has a pH of 7. This isn’t to say, however, that bokashi can’t be utilized as fertilizer. With the right basic solutions, this pH could easily be accounted for.

That being said, bokashi should not be implemented everywhere - the efficiency of bokashi depends on the composition of the waste audit. Bokashi is most effective for food scraps, but could fall short of expectations with garden waste. While the Meadows School is still drafting the implementation plan, other schools should look into bokashi as well.

Sources: <https://thepotagerproject.com/bokashi-vs-compost/#bokashi-problems>,
<https://www.planetnatural.com/composting-101/indoor-composting/bokashi-composting/>,
<https://www.gardenmyths.com/bokashi-vs-composting/>

Interesting Articles and Important Environmental Topic Links:

COP26 Summary Report

<https://www.ieta.org/resources/Resources/COP/COP26-Summary-Report.pdf>

COP26 Website Home Page:

<https://ukcop26.org/>

As described by Dr. Holland's Presentation at our Fall 2021 Speaker Event:

<https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/149100/severe-flooding-in-the-pacific-northwest>

Hope you enjoy these articles and find them interesting!



Thanks for Reading!

- *The National High School Climate Forum*