**Empower the ‘Inconvenient Youth’ via the Utah High School Clean Air Poster Contest**

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Social influence is often instrumental for encouraging pro-social behavior in others. Who else are the most influential but children – with whom parents want to maintain mutual love and respect?

In what we call the ‘Inconvenient Youth’ effect, we have been investigating how teens become natural evangelists, pestering their parents, family and friends about air pollution, as a result from participating in our annual Utah High School Clean Air Poster Contest.

Originally, we piloted the contest in 2015 at Logan High School to engage teens learning to drive about the air pollution implications of their new driving privilege and to teach them driving strategies to preserve air quality (e.g., refrain from idling or encouraging trip-chaining and carpooling, etc.). Since then, the contest has expanded to several high schools across Cache and Grand counties.

Combining science, marketing and art, contestants design educational posters for their campuses and communities to be eligible to win desirable prizes donated by local businesses (mostly $50 gift cards, merchandise, and cash). The resulting posters have been funny, edgy, and tied to teen pop culture and values. Winning posters have then been displayed in schools, shop windows and public bulletin boards throughout the community.

Voluntary feedback surveys reveal that contestants perceive that they have an improved understanding of local air pollution issues, and they say they are more likely to engage in air-protective behaviors that they have promoted in their posters, such as refraining from idling, engaging in carpooling, taking the bus, etc.

Unexpectedly, we also discovered that contestants were nagging others about clean air action, and this ‘Inconvenient Youth’ effect has become the focus of our current research, which will serve as the focus of the presentation.

Many outreach and public service campaigns target children with the hope that environmental education today will result in more environmentally-responsible adults tomorrow. We’re finding, however, that empowering youth today through hands-on outreach may foster more immediate effects through youths’ natural willingness to pester their parents, families and friends on what they’re learning. Past research on children’s social influence indicates that parents in particular feel obliged to comply with their children’s demands to maintain their children’s respect – a powerful force behind their children’s social influence.

Educators and social marketers should recognize the potential power of the Inconvenient Youth and experiment with strategies to channel and broaden their reach for social good.