

Today's Teens: Guardians of Our Future

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Long Island Teen Environmental Activists (LITEA)

What Is LITEA?

The Long Island Teen Environmental Activists (LITEA) is a community based, volunteer-driven organization comprised of like-minded high school teenagers who wish to heighten the public's awareness of environmental pollutants and their effects on human health.

History

The Long Island Teen Environmental Activists was formed in 2007 under the leadership of Tehreem Rehman, a student dedicated to encouraging her peers and local community members to become informed about environmental issues. During the summer of her sophomore year in high school, Tehreem was able to intern at the Fox Chase Cancer Center to aid an ongoing experiment on dioxins, a family of environmental contaminants and endocrine disrupting compounds. Tehreem's experience at Fox Chase Cancer Center convinced her that environmental factors were playing a major role in the climbing rates of cancer around the world and felt compelled to share the knowledge that she had gained from her research with other students. Subsequently, the Long Island Teen Environmental Activists was formed.

Ideology

The purpose of LITEA is to spread awareness on some of the most prevalent environmental toxins, what products contain them, and how exactly these chemicals are contributing to increasing rates of diseases in humans (Picture 2). Members educate the community on taking preemptive measures to reduce their exposure to toxins and advocate for legal action to ensure that everyone is guaranteed a safe environment. (Picture 1). We believe that if today's youth become advocates of environmental safety then it will compel the local community to take action.



Picture 2: Students learn to stray away from personal care items that contain estrogen-mimicking compounds.

Work Performed

- Movie nights including the presentation of the film "Erin Brockovich," which discusses the adverse effects a polluted water supply has on people's health.
- Book discussions including *Our Stolen Future* by Theo Colborn, which reveals how chemicals in the environment effect human reproductive patterns and potentially threaten human survival.
- Cleaning of local parks (Picture 3)
- Implementation of school recycling programs
- Attendance at Regional and National health conferences

- National Institute of Environmental Research Symposium, University of Cincinnati, 2007
- Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors Conference, Stony Brook University, 2008



Picture 3: Cleaning of Heckscher State Park in celebration of Earth Day.

Next Generation of Teens Leads the Way to Secure the "First in the Nation" Ban on Bisphenol-A

This past March, LITEA members presented testimony with prominent health advocates and environmental officials, urging members of the Suffolk-County Legislature to ban the use of products containing Bisphenol-A (Pictures 4 and 5). Bisphenol-A is an environmental estrogen found in canned food linings and hard plastics made of polycarbonates. The leaching of this chemical may cause interference with brain development, hormone disruption, and cancers of the breast as well. Members of the Suffolk-County Legislature were confounded to discover that students had plausible evidence from laboratory experiments demonstrating that early exposure to BPA leads to abnormalities in mammary tissue development. The unyielding efforts of student and adult activists caused the legislature to reach a unanimous decision to pass the Toxin-Free Toddlers and Babies Act on April 2, 2009, making Suffolk the first county in the nation to ban the sale and manufacture of products containing Bisphenol-A



Picture 4: A show of support for the Suffolk-County Legislature bill to ban the carcinogen Bisphenol-A.



Picture 5: LITEA members and Suffolk-County Legislator Steve Stern advocate Suffolk County legislation banning Bisphenol-A, a carcinogen found in baby bottles, sippy cups, and food containers.

Environmental Health Research

This past summer, Rubab conducted an experiment to determine the effect of nicotine on breast epithelial cells under the guidance of Dr. Marian Evinger at Stony Brook University. (Picture 6) Other members worked on experiments involving Bisphenol-A and dioxins. (Picture 7)



Picture 6

Students actively engage in research in the laboratory setting



Picture 7

Impact of LITEA

Attending even a few meetings has caused LITEA members to see their lives in a new perspective. These students are much more wary about which products they buy and some of them hope to begin urging various companies to produce environmentally friendly goods. As the next generation to inhabit the Earth, LITEA members feel it is their duty to ensure the maintenance of the planet for years to come.

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Picture 1: Working diligently towards devising methods to reduce the community's exposure to environmental contaminants.