

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW

Young people are leading the way in campaigns to protect the environment. This trend toward environmental activism is reflected in schools: 99 percent now offer environmental education programs or have ecology clubs. Young people across the nation are taking up environmental causes and, in some cases, are winning huge battles for their communities.

SOME CASE STUDIES

Here are some [examples](#) of students who have made a difference:

- Students at [George Middle School](#) in Portland, Oregon, became concerned when they noticed that heavy rains caused sewers to overflow into a body of water near Columbia Slough. The students, worried about the effect of the pollution on the fish, wrote the mayor, talked to people in the community, and eventually participated in a government study of the problem.
- Central Florida has become a battleground between environmentalists and developers. At risk are the scenic rivers and the [Ocala National Forest](#). More than 100 middle school students in Marion County, Florida, volunteered for a special summer study of the environment using technology. They researched databases, videotaped interviews, and performed a variety of experiments. From their research, they prepared a 10-minute presentation to show to community leaders.
- Eric Champlin of North Canton, Ohio, became a barn owl activist after studying owls for his science project. He built nest boxes for the owls and placed them in farmers' barns. He made tapes of the owls to attract them during mating season and developed the "Adopt a Barn Owl" program.
- Teens in Yucca Valley, California, worked with the head ecologist from nearby [Joshua Tree National Park](#) to develop a project to save the desert tortoise from extinction. The students used math and science to find the number of tortoises, the habitat suitability, and behavior. From their findings, students recommended moving the tortoises to a safer habitat.

GETTING INTO THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Groups such as the [Nature Conservancy](#) welcome student members. Before starting a group from scratch, students should look for existing groups that may have local chapters. Organizations such as [Save the Rain Forest](#), [Save Our Rivers](#), [Adopt a Manatee](#), and [Adopt a Sea Turtle](#) were each started by people concerned with unique problems in their areas.

An article in [Current Health](#) magazine (Kelly, 1995) recommends working with established groups. "Organizations are very happy to have interested young people and will go overboard to help them," says Kelly. If you wish to move out on your own after working with a group, the following suggestions may help.

- Locate a core group in your school. Find a faculty advisor.
- Define your goals. Develop one to three goals.
- Find a name. Make the name positive, not hostile-sounding.
- Announce the first meeting and its agenda. Prepare handouts and posters with goals, suggested group names, and a brief background on the issues.
- Involve as many interested people as possible.
- Once your project is formed, you may be eligible for a grant to fund your work.

THE "VEGGIE" MOVEMENT

Teens today who are concerned with the environment and the ecology are often choosing to go "veggie" (vegetarian). This can be disturbing for parents who worry that their kids are not getting the proper nutrition or who are tired of cooking special meals for their meatless teens. Nevertheless, the movement is on. [Teenage Research Unlimited](#) of Northbrook, Illinois, found that 35 percent of girls and 18 percent of boys thought that being veggie was "in." In another survey, 37 percent of teens said that they try to avoid red meat. This number is 50 percent higher than people a generation older. [Danny Seo](#), 18, founder of a teens-only advocacy group called Earth 2000, says that the "defining focus" of his generation will be "no animal cruelty, no meat."

Concern for animals is the primary reason for kids giving up meat. Groups like [PETA](#) (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and [Animalearn](#) have made teens a prime target for their messages. Most veggies are

indignant about factory-farming practices and link eating meat with ecological destruction. Celebrity followers have given the veggie movement a boost. Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam and Michael Stipe of REM are both vegetarians.

Note: The following sources were used for this topic discussion:

- Kaufman, L., Springen, K., Rogers, A., & Gordon, J. (1995, August 28). [Children of the Corn](#). Newsweek, pp. 60-62.
- Kelly, E.B. (1995, July). [Get Involved with Protecting Your Paradise](#). Current Health, pp. 13-15.
- Peart, K.N. (1995, April 7). [Green Teens Get Results](#). Scholastic Update, pp. 14-16.

Sheila Walsh cCYS