



GREEN TEAM PROJECT

Detergent Detectives Campaign

Overview: In this Green Team Project, students investigate the impact of household cleaning products on local waterways and the strategies for locating and eliminating these offenders. They take the lead in creating a “Detergent Detectives Campaign” for their school that educates the community about the harmful effects of these products on the environment and encourages the use of more sustainable alternatives.

Grade Level: 9-12

Suggested Time: one school day, plus preparation

Learning Goals: Students will understand the environmental impacts associated with the use of common household cleaning products and be able to make more sustainable choices.

Suggested Materials:

- examples of common household cleaners
- examples of eco-friendly household cleaners

Background: Dishwasher detergents are an excellent example of the harmful effects that some household cleaners have on the environment. Most dishwasher detergents contain phosphates. These chemical compounds are used by manufacturers to prevent dirt particles and minerals from being re-deposited on dishes. Unfortunately, phosphates also have severe ecological side effects. As they empty into local waterways, they cause algae bloom by fertilizing the algae to grow in greater numbers. When the algae dies, the bacteria used to break it down uses an enormous amount of oxygen, draining the supply of other aquatic life. The ecosystem is so disrupted that eventually the water body itself can die.

Project Steps:

1. **Form your Green Team.** Gather your group of interested classmates, teachers, staff, and other school members.
2. **Learn** about the harmful effects of household cleaners on local waterways, and identify some of the worst offenders. Research ways to eliminate their use and identify some of the sustainable alternatives available in your community and your school. Visit the library or go online to research from the listed resources.
3. **Determine your strategy.** Discuss with your teammates a plan to educate your school community about the harmful effects of household cleaners on local waterways and to encourage them to make more sustainable choices.

Possible strategies include:

- Draft a “Green Clean” pledge for people to sign.



GREEN TEAM PROJECT

- Designate one or more days to be a “Detergent Detective Day” in which people identify and eliminate harmful cleaning products at home and at school.
 - Meet with your school officials to get administrative support and ideas.
 - Conduct a school-wide education initiative utilizing various media (i.e. website, blog, tweets, posters, classroom presentations, informational tables, flyers).
 - Establish a “green point” award system to recognize school members when they complete a task or reach a goal (i.e. purchasing an eco-friendly product).
 - Create an online resource that links to eco-friendly cleaning products.
 - Staff a help desk at a local grocery store to showcase eco-friendly products and demonstrate how to clean with sustainable alternatives.
4. **Set a goal** and determine how you will **measure its success**.
- Sample Goal: *At least 50% of the student households at the Birch School will replace their dishwasher detergent with an eco-friendly alternative.*
 - Sample Measurement: *The Green Team will inventory the number of student households with automatic dishwashers, record the name of their current dishwasher detergent, and poll students afterward to determine how many product switches were made.*
5. **Plan** your project. Consider these logistical questions:
- *Which member of the Green Team is responsible for which task?*
 - *How will you communicate your plan to your target audience?*
 - *Should you contact your local newspaper or other news media to cover your event?*
 - *Do you need permission from school officials or other staff?*
 - *If you are running a contest, what is your prize and how will it be awarded?*
6. **Implement** your plan and document your efforts with photos or video.
7. **Report** your success by visiting GEF’s National Green Week page online. Share your results, upload photos, video, or art, and write about your Green Team Project!

Resources:

Green Cleaning Network

www.greencleaningnetwork.org

Green Clean Schools

<http://www.healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/gcs/>

Tree Hugger.com (search “Green Cleaning”)

<http://www.treehugger.com/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.gov