

College students teach LTUSD kids environmental lessons

By Aaron Hussmann

Students in Lake Tahoe Unified School District are getting a course in energy and resource efficiency this week from a group of college students who have eschewed normal spring break shenanigans to spread the word on environmentalism.

Members of the San Diego State University student group CALPIRG Energy Service Corps kicked off their alternative spring break by teaching youngsters about energy and how best to conserve it. Older children in the district got a more rigorous curriculum examining specific kinds of resource-conserving technologies and the origins and consequences of fossil fuels.



LTUSD youngsters learn about the environment from college students. Photo/Provided

“This is a perfect tie-in to get them started,” Beth Quandt, science outreach coordinator for LTUSD, said while at the environmental elementary school. “We’ve been teaching environmental science education here for years and what we’ve found is that when you present to kids, they take it home to their parents. So it spreads. It’s part of the idea of the

founding of this school.”

The effort is one of five trips run through the Energy Service Corps, a project of the California Public Interest Research Group – better known as CALPIRG – and AmeriCorps, a service organization that sends teams around America to complete community projects.

Ten students from San Diego State University will reach 1,700 children in LTUSD this week, teaching them how to save energy and cut down on home bills through simple swaps and practices. Those include making buildings, which account for roughly 30 percent of U.S. energy use, more efficient by making repairs to better insulate walls and windows, installing more efficient light bulbs and unplugging appliances when not in use.

That last one is a hidden power suck, which can account for between 5 and 10 percent of residential electricity used in developed countries and may account for 1 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, according to the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

That’s because many devices – including televisions, audio receivers and even CD players – use standby energy, which means they’re constantly drawing power even when they’ve been turned off. The only way to bring their energy use to zero is to unplug. While it might not seem like much savings for all the hassle, consider this: The typical American has 40 such devices plugged in at any given time.

“Knowing now that you can save lots of money on electricity tends to inspire,” said Rafael Guerrero, a student AmeriCorps member with CALPIRG Energy Service Corps. “Numbers like that can really resonate.”

It’s important to reach children early because it’s more difficult to change those habits when they reach adulthood, she said.

The week of education kicked off at Bijou Community School and the Lake Tahoe Environmental Science Magnet School.

The Energy Service Corps volunteers will spend the rest of their time teaching classes in South Tahoe High School, Tahoe Valley Elementary, LTESMS, and Bijou. They'll also be weatherizing local nonprofits and residences, including the League to Save Lake Tahoe and Tahoe Youth & Family Services. That process involves simple fixes that may seem overwhelming or expensive to families and nonprofits, but will, in the end, save them money on their energy bills.

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