

Alaskan Environments

An Environmental Curriculum for
Alaskan Students of All Ages



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Introduction

As Alaskans, we often hear arguments about whether or not to do something because of the environmental consequences. Everyone should be concerned with the consequences of an action because the effects of that action may last a lot longer than anyone thinks. The purpose of this curriculum is to expose high school students to some of the effects that humankind has had on the environment and what we can do to affect this.

Some things that we do make life easier, like buying a car. With a car, travel around town goes a lot quicker. It is nice to be able to go from one end of town to the other in just a few minutes. But what is the cost of this luxury item?

Driving a car requires gasoline, oil, and other petrochemicals. These products are taken from wells, like the ones on Alaska's North Slope. When companies work to remove resources such as oil from the ground, there is usually permanent damage done to the surrounding land and water. We must be careful and keep a close eye on these permanent effects, for this may come back to haunt us sooner than we would like to think. It is not bad to drive a car at all, but environmentalists like to point out that walking can be just as much fun, even though it may take a little longer.

We are going to look at a variety of issues in this book that may be controversial. It is important that everyone form his or her own opinion. The purpose of this book is to show causes and effects so that everyone can make an informed decision.

What can I do about it, you ask? Well, the following pages are filled with activities for environmental science classes. Use what you need to make the class as provocative and enriching as possible. This curriculum was developed with Alaskan students in mind. We hope that this curriculum leads to a better environment for all Alaskans.

Enjoy!

Why Should I Read a Single Page of This Book?

You are the Future

Times are different now than they were, say, two hundred years ago. Back then, no one worried about safe drinking water or lead poisoning. For one reason, no one knew what these chemicals were or how they harm us. For another, there was much less pollution to worry about - they did not live with the machines and technology that we have today.

Alaskans face the same hardships today that they have for thousands of years. Fortunately, now we have things to help us deal with this harsh environment, like cars, ATVs and skiffs. These inventions make it much easier to get around and gather food, or just get to the store.

Unfortunately, there are side effects to these inventions which can poison our subsistence foods. Scientists have found that lead acid batteries left laying around are harmful to the environment because scientists have studied these problems for many years.

But what about the problems that scientists do not know about yet?

Back in the early 20th Century, a chemical compound named DDT was very popular for ridding areas of mosquitoes. Because mosquitoes carry malaria and other deadly diseases, people thought of DDT as a lifesaver. Unfortunately, DDT has a very stable molecule and will not break down very easily, so it is harmful to the environment, especially the arctic environment. Now DDT is outlawed by international laws.

Knowledge is Power

It is important that we know about chemicals and pollutants so that we do not have to trust everything that is told to us. Sometimes, we read two different viewpoints about the environment. Both viewpoints seem to be correct, yet so different from each other.

For example, some people say that recycling is pointless because it costs too much, while others say that the costs of recycling are small compared to what our grandchildren will pay for the items we are not recycling today. By learning both sides of an argument, we can form our *own* opinions.

Learning about the environment, we can educate others.

This book is all about YOU!

This text was designed with you in mind. People in Alaska do not have the same problems as people that live in the lower forty-eight. The same is true about environmental problems. The authors of this text feel that we need to learn about world problems *and* local problems. This text focuses on Alaskan environmental issues so that you can make informed decisions about Alaskan problems.

Let's work together to keep Alaska the best place in the world to live!