

**2006 Massachusetts Envirothon  
Current Issue Problem**

**Acting Locally for Climate Protection**

**Introduction**

Your team has been asked to present your ideas for local action to protect the climate to an active and informed group of citizens represented here by the panel of judges. To prepare, you will need to do some investigation. You will need to use the library and the web to get familiar with climate change science and politics. You will also need to get out and talk to people and visit places in your community to learn more about how climate change will affect your local area. While making sure that your audience understands the big picture, you will develop a proposal for one specific way that your community can take action for climate protection.

Mass Envirothon has prepared several resources to help you with your research and presentation (see <http://www.maenvirothon.org/currentissue.htm>). In particular, see the strategies for community investigation beginning on page 6 of *Questions and Resources for Team Preparation*. If you have questions about your research or your presentation, contact Will Snyder ([wsnyder@umext.umass.edu](mailto:wsnyder@umext.umass.edu) or 413/545-3876).

**The Problem**

The climate of planet Earth is changing faster than at any point in human history, endangering the ecosystems we know and depend upon. Our own human activity, particularly our release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, bears much of the responsibility.

Humans are responsible. Humans can also make a difference. We can take action to slow and reduce the changes. We can also take action to protect our communities and local environment from the worst effects of the changes that are bound to happen. Climate protection means reducing our emissions of the greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. It also means finding ways to minimize the effects that climate change already underway will have on our communities. Prevention and adaptation: both kinds of action are essential.

Dramatic news reports of polar bears, melting ice caps, and shrinking glaciers, coupled with unusual weather right here in Massachusetts over the last year, have started to drive home the reality of what climate change can mean. As representatives of the people who have most at stake — the young people of your community — your team has been asked to serve as consultants to your town on the issue of climate protection. You are to report your findings and your proposal to the decision-making body that represents your community (your town meeting or city council).

Your presentation is a two part opportunity. First, you have a chance to introduce a wider group of citizens to the nature and effects of climate change and the possibilities for climate protection. Second, you have an opportunity to provide the community with your recommendations about what specific next step is most important to take NOW.

Even though it is clear that climate change is happening and that human action can make a difference, making the changes necessary for climate protection is politically difficult because it is likely to require changes in the way we live our lives. In your presentation, be sure to make reference to climate change efforts that are already underway in your community. You should aim to persuade the widest group of citizens possible, and encourage the whole community to think together about its future.

**Some Tips for Your Presentation**

You will be presenting to a panel of five to eight judges. Their job is to ask good questions, score your presentation, and give you feedback on your research and your proposal. You will have 15 minutes for your

presentation, followed by a 10 minute question period.

Show the judges how you know what you know. Make sure they see that you are well informed about climate science, but don't dwell too long on this. Focus on your own community: Tell them who you talked to, where you visited, what your information sources were and how you evaluated them. Emphasize the possibilities for action!

Use maps to introduce your community and its issues.

Be creative! How can you most effectively alert your fellow citizens and show them that their actions can make a difference?

### **In Your Presentation, You Should:**

#### **Introduce your community and its relationship to climate change**

- \* What does your community contribute to climate change, particularly through greenhouse gas emissions? Consider cars and sprawl, energy sources and use, waste generation, forests, agriculture, and land use in general.
- \* How might climate change affect your community? Consider water resources, forests and agriculture, sea level, human health, and ecosystem health and biodiversity.
- \* Who is already researching, planning, and taking action relating to climate change in relation to your community? How did you find them? Include those who are taking actions that will affect climate change, even if this is not their main purpose.

#### **Focus on the specific climate protection issue you have identified as a priority**

- \* Explain why this issue is particularly important to your community.
- \* Outline the possibilities for action by your community.
- \* What policies or actions beyond your community would be helpful?
- \* Which action offers the best possibility for making a significant difference?

#### **Present your plan for climate protection**

- \* Explain whether this is an opportunity for prevention, or adaptation, or both.
- \* Outline the specific action steps you recommend.
- \* Explain: What changes will be required? What costs will this action involve? Who might oppose it? How long will it take? Who will be involved? Is there a role for citizens, including high school students?
- \* What benefits will this plan provide, in addition to climate protection?

### **Special Notes!!**

**Community Awards:** If you do a thorough job in your Current Issue investigation, you will not only score well but you can qualify for Mass Envirothon's Community Research Award. And if you take what you learn and apply it in service to your community, you can qualify for Mass Envirothon's Community Service Award. See <http://www.maenvirothon.org/community.htm> for details.

**Roundtables:** At lunch time on the day of the Envirothon, ALL Envirothon teams are invited to share their Current Issue or other work informally with other teams and interested adults at the "roundtables" session. It's easy and fun: Just bring the display materials from your presentation and be prepared to start a conversation about what your team learned from your community explorations and/or service projects. You can also be more creative: Introduce us to your community. Show off your research prowess. Inspire us with another project that you have been involved with. Click on "roundtables" at <http://www.maenvirothon.org/event06.htm> for more information. (Offering a roundtable is on the official "to do" list for teams pursuing the "Community Research and Community Service awards, but *everyone is invited to join in.*)