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AYEA is a program of the National Wildlife Federation (www.nwf.org)

Demonstration Project: *Week Without Plastics*
Best time for project: Spring (April after Earth Day)

The *Week Without Plastics* project is the brainchild of the Juneau chapter of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action (AYEA). Since its inception two years ago, this project has sought to educate students and community members about the environmental hazards of plastic bag use and provide an alternative in the form of durable canvas bags (emblazoned with the JAYEA logo, though this touch is optional). The entire JAYEA steering committee and many JAYEA members collaborated to man information booths in local grocery stores where they sold canvas bags and NWF “Green at Heart” bracelets and gave out flyers (on recycled paper, naturally) that detailed the disadvantages of plastic.

We used canvas bags and bracelets to sell, flyers to disseminate, and card tables and signs to create the information booths. Funding was required, though the expense depends on the style and quantity of canvas bags that are being purchased. JAYEA utilized our own funds as well as generous donations from community members to finance the project. You can purchase and design your own bags at www.customink.com or you can find environmentally produced, perhaps more expensive bags at <http://www.greenbag.info>

The WWP has traditionally occurred in the spring, though it could easily be staged during any time of the year. The second year of the project, the WWP was scheduled to coincide with Earth Day, which JAYEA found to be an advantageous arrangement, but the WWP could also be tailored to accommodate different community events and need not occur solely in the spring.

The target audience of WWP was a week’s worth of shoppers at several Juneau grocery stores during designated time intervals: approximately 150 people. The WWP required at least 6 dedicated people to pull it off, though this is a conservative estimate—people need to call stores, order materials, and staff the booths for an entire week.

Challenges of the WWP during the second year included procrastination on JAYEA’s part that resulted in a stressful lead-up to the WWP and a disorganized execution of it. A few people ended up working most of the shifts at the booths, which was unfortunate. The first year was more successful, when JAYEA sold the very popular NWF bracelets as well as the bags and adhered more strictly to our timetable. However, the WWP has been an effective education project both years that we have done it—it is just important to “stay on top of things.”

WEEK WITHOUT PLASTICS PROJECT OUTLINE

Problem: Plastic bags are unsightly, wasteful, and harmful to the environment. They get snarled in trees, clog drains, cause soil infertility, release noxious fumes when burned, and kill marine life, among countless other disadvantages.

Goal: The goal of the Week Without Plastics project is to educate our communities about the dangers of plastic and help reduce dependence on plastic bags by providing the alternative of canvas. The sale of canvas bags is also a great fundraising opportunity.

Activity & Timeline:

Generally, WWP occurs the week or two following Earth Day (April 22nd). You can also use Earth Day as a kick-off for the event. About 2 months before the scheduled WWP, design and buy canvas bags (in bulk).

At least 1 month before the planned WWP, chapter leaders should call local grocery stores and obtain permission to set up information tables during designated hours (usually after school and all day on weekends) for the entire week.

(for PR before the WWP, see Promotion)

During the WWP, AYEA members man information booths at local grocery stores every day for a week. These booths are equipped with information about plastic bags, canvas bags (and NWF bracelets, if possible) for sale, and signs identifying the project.

Inventory:

To complete the WWP, the following resources are required:

- At least 6 committed teens willing to work shifts at the booth during the week
- At least 3 locations (and permission to use them) at local grocery stores
- 3 sets of tables, chairs and WWP signs to set up the booths
- At least 100 canvas bags, depending on community size and budget (try www.customink.com or <http://www.greenbag.info>)
- Approximately \$200 to buy the bags (again, this varies)
- Information flyers about the dangers of plastic bags

Promotion:

Promotion of the WWP includes word of mouth by students (contacts in the environmental community and tribal council come in handy for this), radio spots on local radio stations, and posters around the village or town advertising the event.

Celebration:

A fitting way to celebrate a successful WWP might be a “green party” for AYEA members where no plastic is used. You can contact Yngvil Van Guttu yguttu@yahoo.com for totally sustainable supplies made from compostable items.

Evaluation:

The success of the WWP can be evaluated in terms of canvas bags sold and flyers disseminated, as well as in the “anecdotal evidence” constituted by experiences with community members where education occurred. The WWP can also be evaluated in terms of how smoothly it ran, how well-organized and –executed it was, and the number of people reached.