

The Environmental Challenge, a competition for university students

PNWIS Annual Conference, Coeur d'Alene Idaho: October 11 – 13, 2022

Proudly hosted by the Pacific Northwest International Section of the Air & Waste Management Association

The Purpose

The Environmental Challenge gives student teams the opportunity to develop solutions to a mock environmental problem and present their solution to a panel of environmental professionals. We do not give you a lot of numbers to crunch. We are more interested in hearing about the issues involved, how you interpreted the problem, the rational you use to get to your conclusions, and how well you communicate your ideas. In light of all this, we incorporate a “tweak” to simulate how in the real world, nothing ever goes as planned. There is often new information that comes along and changes the game. Remember, the tweak is given last minute, the purpose being that you will need to interact with the Players in order to most effectively address this problem.

WHAT'S IN A LAKE, ANYWAY?

Persistent droughts have left lake Washhashore at critically low levels. Sediments have been migrating, energy production is dwindling, and that's not the only problem that has surfaced in the lake. Unbeknownst to the everyday citizens of Idahipsy there used to be a large crime ring in the region. In the 1920s the mob-bosses of the Inland Northwest leading ‘waste transportation’ companies decidedly dumped their excess ‘materials’ in 55-gallon drums within the lake. These had been hidden for years, but due to the critically low water levels has been discovered. It is unknown what is inside of these drums, but is anticipated to be a mixture of old chemical products and solid waste from their ceased operations. How are you going to determine what is inside of these drums? What are the concerns of what materials could be inside of these, including concerns with the safety of disturbing and opening these mysterious drums? Are there concerns with the lakebed? Who is responsible for the cleanup of these operations, and potential liability of long-term risks from these unknowns? Is there a danger to the public? Idahipsy needs your help.

The Expectation

You must develop a strategy to solve the issues that have come up from the waste discovery. You are expected to discuss these issues with the stakeholders and include your solutions in the final presentations at the conference. Detailed calculations are not as important as your logic train, process, conceptualizations, creativity and integration of the Tweak into your proposal. Remember you can come up with assumptions, but they will need to pass the “straight-face” test. This is, sort of, like the real world!