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Teachers Schooled in Climate Change Curriculum at UNH Workshop
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DURHAM, N.H. -- When Portsmouth High School teacher John Herrmann goes to professional development workshops, he looks for very specific tools and techniques he can adapt to his science curriculum. The “Indicators of Climate Change in the Northeast 2005” workshop held last week at the University of New Hampshire’s Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space (EOS), left the ebullient ninth and tenth grade earth sciences teacher brimming with ideas.

“I’m always looking for ways to pull things into my curriculum and build new anchor programs. So, after today, here are the new potential projects I can do,” Herrmann says rattling off a string of projects related to the topic of climate change. He will, for example, enhance the “biosphere” he and his students have created by incrementally “upping the carbon dioxide levels” on the large spider that dwells within. Herrmann’s students will also record observations in “climate journals” and make a “So What?” poster detailing the reasons why the consequences of climate change matter.

Teachers were given a host of web-based resources upon which to draw when they return to their schools and begin to incorporate climate change curriculum into their classroom work.

The workshop, which was sponsored by EOS’s Climate Change Research Center, was based on a report of the same name written by CCRC professor Cameron Wake that compiled research findings on a dozen climate change indicator trends over the last 100 years.

These trends, including annual temperature, snowfall, bloom dates for lilacs, apples, and grapes, the length of the growing season, and ice-out dates on lakes, provide a clear picture of a region that has experienced a significant warming trend in the last century and, in particular, during the last 30 years.

For example, the average Northeast winter temperature has increased 2.8 degrees Fahrenheit from 1899 to 2000 and, during that same period, the growing season increased by eight days. Days with snow on the ground decreased by 16 from 1970-2000, and for the coastal parts of the region, sea surface temperatures and levels have also risen.

States the report, “Climate changes. It always has and it always will. What is unique in modern times is that human activities are now a significant factor causing climate to change.” The report points out that while it cannot be conclusively proven from the data that regional warming is due...
to human actions, “the warming is fully consistent with what we would expect from global warming caused by increasing greenhouse gas concentrations.”

During the all-day session, one teacher questioned how she and others could motivate students to take a leadership role in learning about and dealing with climate change and global warming when they continue to see skepticism and a lack of political leadership on the issue at the national level.

To that, Wake answered, “I think, in terms of teaching kids, this is a great opportunity to talk about the scientific method. Scientists are trained to be skeptical. And while the media always tries to ‘balance’ opinions on these issues by presenting ‘both sides,’ the weight of evidence has tipped the scales – there is no longer any doubt in the scientific community that climate change and global warming are occurring – the only debate is just how much is due to human-induced emissions.”

Addressing the workshop participants, Bill Burtis of Clean Air-Cool Planet – a Portsmouth-based non-profit dedicated to finding and promoting solutions to global warming and publisher of the climate indicators report – added, “We should not be afraid to talk about climate change anymore because there are solutions.” And it will be the kids schooled in climate change by these and other teachers who will, it is hoped, help implement those solutions.

To read the “Indicators of Climate Change in the Northeast 2005” report, go to http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/information/pdf/indicators.pdf. For more information on upcoming climate change workshops, contact Elizabeth Burakowski at UNH by e-mail: ean2@unh.edu. For more information about climate change initiatives for schools and companies, contact Bill Burtis at Clean Air-Cool Planet: (603) 422-6464, ext. 105.