



NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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Youngsters try their hands at interactive Earth Day

By Jo Anita Miley

Kindergarten through fifth-grade students donned personal protective clothing in preparation for a mock environmental exercise, where they learned firsthand how the Army Engineering and Support Center-Huntsville completes an environmental field investigation.

The University Place Elementary School students celebrated Earth Day April 20 by watching a team of students walk through the whole process, from the sampling of the mock material to a personal wash-down.

“Each student played a role. Some students sampled the soil, some participated in the decontamination process and others in the audience acted as the Green Team, to assist with finding earth-friendly solutions for helping clean up the environment after a hazardous material spill incident,” Will Eggleston, safety engineer for the Center’s Safety Office, said.

Eggleston attended University Place Elementary School and said he had fond memories from his time there.

“It was great to be back at my elementary school and participate in such a fun exercise,” he said. “I think children learn more from an interactive activity.”

Before the children started, Lt. Co. David Bailey, deputy commander at Huntsville Center described the Corps’ role in environmental investigations and the environmental program.

“We explained that our research led us to believe that the area had been contaminated with a hazardous material. We told them that we were sending in teams to take soil samples of this very dangerous contaminant of concern,” Eggleston said. “I asked them to help me ‘clean up’ the earth.”

Steve Willoughby, chief of the Center’s Electronic Security Branch, and Scott Bradley, an environmental engineer with the Center’s Engineering directorate, told the students about how employees work hard to find earth-friendly solutions when working on projects and gave students environmentally friendly ideas. Willoughby and Bradley also attended University Place Elementary School.

More than 450 students participated in the event. The volunteers set up four work zones for the scenario. Two students from each grade were divided into six groups. The rest of the students made up a ‘Green Team’ with an assignment to find earth-friendly solutions for the questions the Corps’ team asked.

“We gave the students spoons to collect the soil. They mixed the soil in the bowls to get a good representative sample,” Kellie Williams, a safety specialist in the Center’s Safety Office, said. “Our work zones included the hot zone where the contaminated soil was located, the decontamination zone where we removed the student’s personal protection clothing to prevent spreading the contaminant; and the support zone where emergency responders and safety specialists tested the air.

Administrators and teachers at the school stayed to watch their students learn about environmental field work and participate in the activities.

“Our students enjoyed the activity – it was a great hands-on experience for the children to get to role play,” Janice Summerhill, event coordinator and teacher at University Place Elementary School, said. “They haven’t had the chance to participate in such a fun and educational event for Earth Day in a long time.”

Towana Davis, school principal, said the Corps’ facilitating an interactive Earth Day celebration is an innovative way to expose the students to science.

Sgt. Woof, the safety mascot for Army Environmental Command, was also present at the Earth Day event.

Davis said she was pleased that the mascot was present for the event. His unexploded ordnance safety platform is a great teaching tool for teaching the children what to do when they encounter explosives. Woof gave out safety guides, coloring books and environmental awareness book marks regarding UXO safety.

“We were excited about the hands-on activities during Earth Day, but having ‘Sgt. Woof’ pay us a visit to help us celebrate is an added plus for the students at University Place Elementary School,” Davis said. “He is a big hit today.”

Earth Day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970. Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. senator from Wisconsin, spearheaded the idea. The campaign for Earth Day began as a grassroots effort to teach about environmental stewardship, create an awareness of the environment’s fragility and to enlighten the mainstream of American society. The campaign caught on quickly and evolved into what we now celebrate as Earth Day.

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Acronyms

UXO – Unexploded Ordnance

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