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Eco Fair Blends Fun and Facts for Paducah Area Middle Schoolers

PADUCAH, KY – Lone Oak Middle School student Trevor Tilley was impressed with a 3rd Annual Eco Fair demonstration about how the nation’s landfills are swelling with waste that takes nearly an eternity to biodegrade.

“It surprised me that Styrofoam didn’t take the longest to decompose,” Tilley said. “It was glass bottles.”

Glass bottles and jars take about 1 million years to break down, according to the Recycle Now! exhibit at the May 15 Eco Fair in West Kentucky Wildlife Management Area. Nearly 500 sixth-graders from Lone Oak, Heath, and St. Mary attended the event, hosted by the Paducah Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) and Department of Energy.

Recycle Now! is a recycling facility at 1830 N. 8th St. in Paducah. It is part of the Greater Paducah Sustainability Project, a Paducah nonprofit organization that CAB Chairman Ralph Young supports. Information: www.recyclenowpaducah.com/

Students learned at the Recycle Now! demonstration that people throw out enough glass bottles and jars every month to fill a giant skyscraper.

“Our exhibit was a little more hands-on this year,” Young said. “They had to use their brains and rank which waste breaks down the fastest.”

St. Mary student Emily Hodges said her family uses curb-side recycling. “We hardly have trash anymore.”

Other Eco Fair activities were fish and waterfowl monitoring, water filtration, tree sustainability, cooking with solar heat, and radiation in everyday life.

Students also heard about the history of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant and the Department’s role in overseeing environmental cleanup.

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The Department owns the plant and surrounding land that is part of the management area. The CAB is an independent group that advises the Department on cleanup issues.

Eco Fair took place near a small lake just west of the plant. Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources personnel showed students how waterfowl are banded and tracked with transmitters, and how fish are stunned with mild electrical charges so they can be examined to monitor their population.

“It’s cool they can shock the water and not kill the fish,” said Carson Barrow, a Lone Oak Middle School student.

Heath Middle School student Carter Gray was impressed to learn how the earth naturally filters water. Classmate Chanyng Floyd was curious to know that some ceramic dinner ware, smoke detectors, and other household products are mildly radioactive but not harmful.

“It’s interesting that we actually eat out of something that’s radiated, but it’s not bad,” Floyd said.

Other Eco Fair participants were the CAB; Natural Resources Conservation Service; DOE cleanup contractor LATA Environmental Services of Kentucky; Paducah Power System; and the Tennessee Valley Authority. Swift & Staley Mechanical Contractors, EHI Consultants, Good ‘Ol Boys, The Paducah Sun, and Paducah Water provided support.

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Lone Oak Middle School 6th graders pet a mallard hen at the 3rd Annual Eco Fair May 15 in West Kentucky Wildlife Management Area.



Ralph Young of Recycle Now! explains to Eco Fair attendees the value of recycling. Young is chairman of the Paducah Citizens Advisory Board, which advises the Department of Energy regarding cleanup issues at the Paducah Site.