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Ohio EPA To Hold a Public Hearing on 2012 Ohio Environmental Education Fund Agenda

Ohio EPA invites comments on the 2012 annual agenda for the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF). The agenda lays out funding priorities for environmental education grants, environmental science and engineering career initiatives, watershed awareness, and water quality monitoring programs for students and adults.

A public hearing will be held March 29, 2011, to discuss the annual agenda, answer questions and accept public comments. The meeting is at 10:30 a.m. at Ohio EPA Conference Room A, 6th Floor, Lazarus Government Center, 50 West Town Street, Suite 700, Columbus.

OEEF plans to award about \$700,000 in grants up to \$50,000 each. These education projects will target the regulated community, general public and students (pre-school through university level). Six funding priorities are proposed to support the state's environmental regulatory and K-12 education priorities, and to help local communities meet unfunded or only partially funded federal environmental mandates. The program also will set aside \$100,000 for smaller grant projects of up to \$5,000 each.

Recent grants for education projects targeting the regulated community have provided waste audits for businesses, seminars on federal environmental reporting requirements, training for hospitals on managing pharmaceutical wastes, and programs for fleet managers on electric vehicles and alternative fuels. Another project is helping golf course managers implement best practices to conserve water, manage chemical and nutrient inputs and provide golf course wildlife habitat.

Recently funded projects targeting the general public audience have provided mercury thermometer exchanges, and programs to help homeowners maintain septic systems and reduce storm water runoff from their property. Other projects are educating citizens about actions they can take to reduce smog and protect drinking water supplies.

OEEF funds K-12 education projects that are aligned with the Ohio Department of Education's academic content standards for science education. Recent grants are providing supplies for outdoor learning areas on school grounds, and equipment to help students and teachers monitor local water quality. Many funded projects provide professional development workshops in environmental science for pre-service and in-service teachers.

The Fund will continue to provide \$50,000 annually for scholarships to support environmental science and engineering students at Ohio colleges and universities. To promote middle and high school student interest in environmental careers, OEEF will continue to support State Science Day, the National Engineers Week Future City Competition and the Ohio Envirothon competition.

To address federal requirements to improve water quality in streams not meeting national standards, many communities are working to educate residents about how to reduce storm water runoff and prevent pollution in local watersheds. Ohio EPA also has new rules allowing citizen groups and school classes to submit data from local stream monitoring efforts to the Agency's database on water quality. OEEF will continue to fund projects that support these efforts.

Legislation creating OEEF requires that an agenda for each upcoming fiscal year be submitted to the General Assembly on April 1, after a public hearing is held. The appointed OEEF advisory council members also will discuss the agenda and public comments that have been received at their regular meeting on March 30, 2011, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the Center for Excellence at Ohio EPA's address above. The council will review new grant applications for the January 15 grant cycle. The meeting is open to the public and applicants are encouraged but not required to attend. Funding for these programs comes from a portion of the civil penalties that Ohio EPA collects for violations of Ohio's air and water pollution control laws.

A [fact sheet on the 2012 annual agenda](#) is available online. Comments are due by March 30 and can be mailed to Carolyn Watkins, Ohio EPA Office of Environmental Education, P.O. Box 1049, Columbus, Ohio 43216-1049, faxed to (614) 728-1275 or [e-mailed](#).