

# Students strive for sustainability

## Students brainstorm to soothe the earth's environmental issues

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**MID-CITY** Along with completing a history assignment and finding a prom date, saving the environment is becoming a priority for high school students these days.

It can be hard for young minds, some of whom will one day become world leaders, to ignore an issue that is constantly in their faces, whether it's through news reports or documentaries starring former vice presidents.

Rather than sit idly by, students from more than 13 local private and public high schools are taking action, reaching out to their peers and insisting that they have the power to create change.

A group of environmentally-minded students spent a few hours away from the classroom on Wednesday at the Crossroads School, attending the first Youth Environmental Leadership Summit, where they brainstormed solutions to global warming and forming a green youth coalition.

Students from several Los Angeles County high schools, including Santa Monica High School, Our Lady of Malibu, Dorsey High School and Environmental Charter High School gathered for the three-hour summit, hosted by the Crossroads Student Environmental Action Club and The Green Ambassadors, a coalition of the Vistamar School, Hamilton High School, Venice High School and Environmental Charter.

More than 50 students attended the conference, wearing cream-colored youth summit shirts and cheering along as student after student spoke passionately about global warming and how teenagers should unite to make a difference, rather than sitting at home watching the most recent episode of "Laguna Beach" or listening to their iPods. The event in itself incorporated sustainable practices, including the biodegradable plates on which the students ate their organic lunches.

Representing their school's environmental and sustainability clubs, the students shared green initiatives that have been implemented at their schools.

At Santa Monica High School, the goal of its Samohl Solar Alliance club is to transform the high school into a zero-emissions campus one day. The club is well on its way to achieving this goal, starting with the conversion of the high school pool to be heated by thermal power this summer.

The club was founded by seniors Isabel Polon and Molly Strauss in 2004.

The Crossroads School's Student Environmental Action Club has helped minimize the presence of bottled water on campus, selling reusable water canisters that the students can fill up at vending machines. The school has also eliminated the use of polystyrene products.

The club is also working with the school to convert its fleet of buses to run on biodiesel. There is currently one Crossroads school bus running on biodiesel.

### THE POWER OF THE STUDENT VOICE

Many companies target youths with their products and teenagers should use that power to their advantage, said Sabina Ibarra, an 11th grade student at the Environmental Charter High School.

Youth should dictate what is hot, not corporations, she said.

Students should demand environmentally safe products, such as cell phones made from recycled parts and locally made organic cotton T-shirts that didn't originate in sweatshops, Ibarra cited as an example.

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Sabina Ibarra  
Junior, Environmental Charter High School

“We’re L.A. and if the youth of L.A. can get together, we can set the trend,” Ibarra said to the cheers and applause of her peers.

Marlon Williams, an 11th grader at Environmental Charter High School and a Green Ambassador doesn't believe that young people are involved in environmental initiatives as they should be.



Photo courtesy  
**SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT:** Santa Monica high schoolers on Wednesday inspect the B100 Biodiesel truck, which runs on fuel derived solely from soybeans. Students from more than 13 local private and public high schools attended the first Youth Environmental Leadership Summit.

The difference between the Green Ambassadors and many activist organizations is the student group is not just about preaching, they actually offer solutions that have been implemented, Williams said.

“We can have the power to affect someone else,” he said.

It seems appropriate that the summit was held in Santa Monica, a city whose government is leading the way in sustainable measures.

“(Adults) look at the enthusiasm of high school students and somehow listen to them in a way they don't listen to other adults,” said Kelly Olsen, a former City Councilmember who attended the event.

### FROM DIESEL TO BIODIESEL

It was the Green Ambassadors that ultimately convinced the Southern California Disposal Company, the sponsor of the summit, to convert its entire fleet of trucks to run on biodiesel fuel, a clean-burning alternative that is both non-toxic and biodegradable.

When the company's fleet of vehicles was still operating on petroleum-based diesel, the management did consider converting to biodiesel, but brushed off the idea as unfeasible.

Then a company employee attended a meeting hosted by the Green Ambassadors and was inspired by the young students' enthusiasm for biodiesel fuel and environmentalism.

It was this reason that Southern California Disposal Company funded the summit — to encourage high school students that they can make a difference, using their company as an example.

“It was a huge part of our decision to make that transition,” said General Manager Mike Matosian at the summit. “Don't underestimate the impact you can make.”