



This week's Northwest Guardian

News Sports Weekend Community Ledger Viewpoint Education Transitions Health Beat Sustainability Across DOD

JBLM

Search the Northwest Guardian for: Search

Print E-Mail

JBLM Net Zero initiative

McChord students learn where the Kool-Aid goes

Program looks at effect humans have on water

By Jake Dorsey/Northwest Guardian

Published: 02:47PM April 3rd, 2014

The children of McChord Field's Youth Center flooded to the water runoff display, already jazzed by Wally the Water Drop. A colorful, freshly cleaned plastic landscape greeted them, surrounded by spray bottles and salt shakers full of "pollution" — powdered cocoa and Kool-Aid.

Air Force Lt. Col. Jennifer Phelps was ready for them. As deputy commander of Joint Base Lewis-McChord's Directorate of Public Works, she knows all about the effects runoff water pollution can have on an ecosystem, especially one as fragile as Puget Sound.

"Here, the intent is to have kids to potentially be that agent for change in their house," Phelps said. "Kids' questions are unfiltered. When they see mom or dad doing something, they're like, 'When I was at school, I saw we're not supposed to do that.'"

The display was part of DPW's outreach through its Environmental Division, said Martin Burris, the division's director. Despite being made for children, the scientific concepts are important, and it all ties back into JBLM's Net Zero initiative and its April focus, water resources.

The kids first take their preferred pollution and sprinkle a healthy dose of it somewhere on the display — brown for animal waste, pink for petroleum waste and so on. Then the kids grab the spray bottles and bring on the rain.

As the water pools and flows on the display, it takes the pollution with it, turning riverbeds and bays pink or brown.

Children also got to practice pointing out environmentally harmful practices on a special chart. They learn the harm in pouring motor oil down a storm drain or watering the concrete instead of the lawn.

Burris said those practices can lead to polluting not just surface water sources, but underground aquifers that can't be purified once they're polluted.

Stormwater coordinator Jennifer Smith supervised children as they sprinkled cocoa powder on one corner of the display. It was a hilltop range for farm animals, and the rain runoff dragged the cocoa powder into the simulated ocean. She asked the kids about animal waste they have at home.

"Do you make sure to pick up their do-do?" Several children said yes, talking about picking up after their dogs.

"It's getting them to that connection to what happens with a drain," Smith said as the kids applied more rain.

Second grader Rimarah Dorn learned that lesson well.

"My favorite thing was learning not to put water on the sidewalk," she said.

As to why it was important?



Jake Dorsey/Northwest Guardian
Lt. Col. Jennifer Phelps explains water run-off effects to kids at McChord Youth Center.

“So you can wash your hands, brush your teeth and shower,” she said.

Jake Dorsey: jake.dorsey@nwguardian.com

THE NORTHWEST GUARDIAN - To suggest story ideas or submit copy contact us at:
Building 1010, Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington 98433 or call 253-477-0183 or 253-477-0182
For advertising information call: Bernie Fernandez 253-597-8504
© Copyright 2011 Northwest Guardian | Feedback at: NWGEditor@nwguardian.com