

press release or local news article

overview:

Connecting in-school learning with our local communities is often a challenge. Changing Currents, however, provides a great opportunity for significant sharing of first-hand data about a local issue, and empowers students as scientists and communicators!

In this activity, your students will learn to write a press release and/or a local news article on what they learned through their stream assessment, or how they've decided to act on their findings.

time it takes:

- 1.5 – 3 hrs for planning and writing the press release or local news article

planning:

- Gather relevant contacts in your local and community-focused media: neighbourhood or local newspapers, magazines, radio features, or local news shows. Gather examples of such media to share with your students.
- Decide if you want to do a press release or a news article and how you'd like to use EcoSpark's handouts SCE01 and SCE02. Prepare them if necessary.

students at work at a stream!



teaching and learning strategies:

In-Class Preparation

1. Review the data from your Changing Currents workshop. What conclusions did you make from the data you found?
2. Discuss with students why you would want to publicize these conclusions to the community. What are the important details to make sure to include? Discuss what makes a good article and/or a good press release.

the medium is the message

Usually, a press release is used to alert the press about an event or study result, and an article is meant to share a newsworthy story.

3. Make a brainstorming table on the board with the titles: *key points* and *what makes a good article*. Use this to collect your student's ideas
4. Decide as a class how you'd like to work: in groups, or individually.

Writing the Press Release/ News Article

1. Hand out and review EcoSpark's templates (SCE01 and/or SCE02) to give students some guidance and structure for their writing, or give examples of relevant news articles or press releases for them to work with.
2. Have students draft and write their pieces, and then revise and edit each other's work.

publishing pictures:
 What photos does your class want to use? Consider:

- taking your own
- using students' photos
- getting permission to use photos from the internet
- cut pictures out of newspapers/ magazines

After Writing the Press Release/ News Article

1. Assess student work and distribute selected articles or press releases to relevant news sources.
2. Share any publications with your class, school and community!
3. Engage your class in a discussion about their action.

extension: after-activity discussion

What are the advantages and disadvantages of raising awareness through this activity?

Were you successful in getting the word out?

What could have made this better or easier the next time around?

What other ideas do you have for community awareness?



press release template

A press release is a great way to get the word out about an upcoming campaign, event or news release. It will tell the readers (members of the press) exactly what they need to know in order to publicize your issue or event. Having local media working with you is a terrific way to get a 'buzz' going about your issue or event.

Remember: press releases are factual! If you want to include an opinion, it needs to be in a quotation.

Press releases follow a very strict outline. Follow the format below to impress the news editors.

There are 5 basic parts to a press release:

Formal Headings. This is where the specific outline of a press release comes in. Center your school's logo at the top. The first thing written on the page should say **media release** – signifying what it is. Below that comes your contact information (choose a representative from the class who can be the 'Head of Communications'). This person should include as much contact information as possible, including a phone number and email address. Under the contact information comes the date, and then the term **For Immediate Release**. See EcoSpark's example Press Release for a look at the outline of the page.

The Headline: Like a title, the headline should be short and catchy. It should grab the attention of the reader to make them want to read more. Try to make it reflect the event or issue you are advertising. It should tell what your press release is about, but keep the reader wanting more.

Opening Paragraph: This paragraph will answer all the basic information about the event or issue. *It is the most important paragraph.* Start it with your town/city name and date. Keep the content interesting by telling the 'who, what, where, when and how' like a story. Keep the reader 'hooked' by providing an interesting fact or aspect of your event or issue, and making them curious to read more.

The Body: This is where you can elaborate on your story, including the hook. Start with the most important information. It is also great to be able to insert quotes from reputable sources. Ask your teacher or your principal to make a short statement about what you're doing. Facts and figures can also add authority. The body is where you state why this event or issue is newsworthy.

The Closing Paragraph: Restate the contact information, and a little bit about your school, class or ecoteam. This is to give the reader a some context on who is writing. If your school group is a science class, say so!

Useful Tips for Writing:

- Keep all sentences and paragraphs short and to the point. The press release should be kept to one page in length. Use an easy-to-read font and 1.5 spacing between paragraphs so it is easy to read.
- Make sure to proof-read. Spelling and grammar mistakes are not interesting to editors.
- Make your press release reportorial rather than opinionated. Use the third person ('The students of Martin Grove', for example), and never 'I, me, or we'.

example press release:

For immediate release
April 18, 2011

Toronto Students Engage with the Environment through Film

TORONTO, ON – EcoSpark and Planet in Focus will be screening environmental films created by Toronto high school students on Wednesday, June 1st at 7pm at the Revue Cinema. The films were created through EcoSpark's "Our Green Schools" program (in partnership with the Toronto District School Board) and will be screened along with "Never Lose Sight", an official festival selection from Planet in Focus 2010. The "Our Green Schools" program has helped teams of students at five schools in the Toronto District School Board to use film to explore school-based environmental initiatives. The "Our Green Schools Film Screening" will be their premiere.

"These films have allowed our environmentally passionate students to explore environmental initiatives in a creative way," Paul Tucker, EcoSpark's Environmental Education Manager said. "Many Toronto youth realize that the environment is one of our most pressing issues and these films are their attempt to educate the local community regarding five different issues and initiatives."

The films will portray the students' perspective on sustainability, recycling, solar PV panels, electronic waste, and LEED certification. "The Our Green Schools Film Screening will be an exciting event as we will see five different environmental issues through the eyes of youth," said Tucker. The student filmmakers will also participate in a question and answer period after the screening.

"Never Lose Sight", from the National Film Board by Sarah McNair Landry, will follow the student films. It is an eye-opening look into the environmental challenges facing Nunavut. This film was an official selection at Planet in Focus Film Festival in 2010.

Event Details:

Wednesday, June 1st at 7:00 pm
At the Revue Cinema (400 Roncesvalles Avenue)

Admission is FREE

Reserve free tickets by email: tickets@ecospark.ca

Contact:
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Photos available upon request

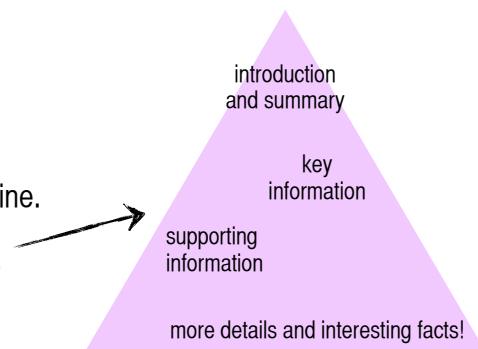


local news article template

An informative news article is short, concise and interesting. Here are two example articles, one published for 680 news (July 2011), and another published in the Toronto Star (May 2011), both about local environmental issues. Both follow a basic news article outline, which includes the following, simple components:

- A catchy title
- What is the newsworthy event?
- Who is involved with the event or issue?
- An interesting quote from a stakeholder or expert in the field
- Why is this story newsworthy?
- More detailed explanation of the issue or event, location, and time line.

Sometimes, you can think of a news article being shaped like a triangle. The news story is summarized at the beginning of the piece, but as you continue read through the article, you get more and more information about the story.



example news articles:

Eight Toronto beaches get Blue Flags

680News staff
2011/07/09

TORONTO, Ont. – It will be a hot weekend and the city of Toronto has some good news. Eight of the city's eleven beaches are flying a Blue Flag this summer, meaning it will be safe to swim there.

Bluffer's beach is flying the flag for the first time this summer. Cherry beach, Woodbine beach and Ward's Island beach have also been cleared for swimming.

The Blue Flag is an internationally recognized eco-label awarded to beaches that achieve high standards in 29 criteria including water quality, environmental education, environmental management, and safety and services. These criteria are grouped into the following two categories:

Imperative criteria – beach must comply

Guideline criteria – increase the standards at the beach even more but are not mandatory

In addition to meeting these requirements, a Blue Flag beach must be accessible for an unannounced inspection by the Foundation for Environment Education (FEE).

Blue Flag awards are only valid for one season. After each season, a Blue Flag beach must be reassessed and meet all the requirements before an award is renewed. However, if conditions at a Blue Flag beach change or if it fails to fulfill the imperative criteria, then the Blue Flag award is withdrawn.

A solar solution to aging school roofs

May 19, 2011

Raveena Aulakh – Staff reporter

Over 300,000 solar panels will be installed on the roofs of hundreds of Toronto public schools at no cost to taxpayers, it was announced on Thursday.

AMP Solar Ltd. Partnerships, the company that will install the panels, will spend more than \$120 million to replace old roofs and will also give the school board a share in the profits from selling the solar energy.

“It’s a win-win situation for everyone involved,” said Chris Spence, director of education for the Toronto District School Board during an announcement Thursday at Hillcrest Community School, near Davenport and Bathurst Sts.

Spence called it a groundbreaking partnership and the first initiative of its kind by a school board in North America.

The exact number of installations depends on how many applications are approved by the government, said Sheila Penny, the board’s director of strategic building and renewal. “But we expect most to be cleared and be back with us by June.”

There may be some structural issues at some schools, she added.

About 450 schools in total will have solar installations.

When installed, the solar panels will generate up to 66 megawatts of green energy a year — enough to meet the needs of as many as 6,000 Toronto homes.

The power generated will be sold to the distribution grid for consumers, including the school board.

AMP Solar will be responsible for the construction, technology, power generation, financing, roofing, operations and maintenance of the panels. It will also pay the board rent for the space it uses.

The solar panels will be installed in the next three to four years, while the roofs will be replaced over a period of 20 years.

The first batch of panels are expected to be installed by the end of this year and will be able to generate power by spring, said Daniel Argiros, spokesperson for AMP Solar Ltd.

Roofs in about 61 Toronto schools in dire need will be replaced first, said Penny.