

Kids asked to ‘imagine day without water’

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YORK BEACH -- First grade students from Village Elementary School gathered around a large model of a sink at the York Beach Ballfield Oct. 23, clutching small pots in which they had just planted seeds. They were waiting to water their new plants from the sink’s faucet, expecting that it would work normally and without issue. However, when the faucet was turned, the students realized that the sink did not work, and they would not be able to water their seeds from it.

The lesson that water is easily taken for granted in the community was taught by this activity and many others at the Imagine a Day Without Water event. Around 221 Village Elementary School students and many other teachers, chaperones, and community members attended the event.

This is the fifth year that the Value of Water Campaign has encouraged communities around the world to encourage education and advocacy about the most vital resource on the planet, water, through the annual Imagine a Day Without Water initiative. This year, the York Water District and the York Sewer District partnered with the Maine Water Environment Association to put on York’s first -ever community event.

Joe Dignam of the York Water District and Phil Tucker of the York Sewer District were two of the event’s primary planners. According to Dignam, one of the main goals of the day was to teach students and community members that water should not be taken for granted.

“Basically the idea of whole thing is to plant the seed in children’s minds that the water that comes out of your tap is directly linked back to the environment,” he said. “[Through] these events, on a basic level, we can make the connection in kids that... without the high quality drinking water we have, it would make life more difficult.”

Dignam and Tucker reached out to school superintendent Lou Goscinski, and it was decided that Village Elementary School students would be the perfect target audience for the event.

“We had sit-down meetings with the team at Village Elementary and formed a plan on what works with that age for lessons,” Tucker said. “We ended up settling on four activities.”

One of the four activities, or “stations”, included a “Touch a Truck,” featuring a fire truck from the York Beach Fire Department, a “jet-and-back truck” used to clean sewers, ATVs, service trucks, and other construction equipment from the York Sewer Department, that students were invited to see up close.

Another station was the watershed model station. This featured an educational model that demonstrated different scenarios to students, like how runoff from heavy rain on the mountain will add extra pollutants into waterways and will affect quality of the water.

The third station features a “toilet versus trash” game. There were eight items such as candy wrappers, flushable wipes, paper towels, and toys that represented urine and feces, that students were asked to categorize into items that belong in the toilet, and items that belong in the trash. Students got to throw the items either into a model toilet or a trash can, and were rewarded with sunglasses after playing.

The fourth station was the seed planting station. Each student received a two-inch pot, soil, and butterfly weed seeds. They planted their seeds, and once they finished planting, tried to turn a water tap on to water their plant, but no water came out.

“This example helps to make the connection about how it would be if there was no water,” Tucker said. “If they go to turn a faucet on and no water comes out, you can say imagine we had no water at all, and [kids] make the connection.”

Jerry Reid, the commissioner of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, attended the event, and said that he believes education about water issues is important for the public.

“It tends to be invisible, you turn on your water faucet and you just assume you will have a reliable supply of clean water available to you, but there is a tremendous amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to make that possible,” he said. “Events like this are really important to get people thinking about how they can be a player in supporting that work through disposing of things responsibly and conserving water.”

State Representative Lydia Blume, representative of House District 3, also attended the event. She said that the work she does in the State House is very much related to water work, as she is on the Environmental and Natural Resources Committee, and is also on the Marine Resources Committee. She said that she wholeheartedly supported the event.

“I like some of the displays here to relate to this youthful group, one in particular is what goes down the toilet and what does not go down the toilet,” she said. “I really admire the setup that they have here; they have done a very good job of relating important information to that age group.”

Nick Addivinola is the father of first-grade student Lucas who attended the event with Village Elementary School.

“This is a great lesson for the kids to learn,” he said. “Lucas has been curious about where our water comes from and where the sewer goes... certainly water is an important resource that is taken for granted, so this sort of thing is invaluable for children to learn that it is not inevitable that we will always have water.”

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