

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Environmental Awareness/Action: Environmental education and integrating environmental practices into our planning will change negative outcomes of the past and improve our future.

Youth Council members lead the way toward sustainability

By Eva Sampedro and Betzie Arenos Valero
Holland Youth Advisory Council

The Holland Youth Advisory Council (HYAC), a group of local high school students aiming to raise awareness about important issues in the community, is hoping to reduce food waste going to the landfill and reduce energy waste at home.

The HYAC Environmental Committee has partnered with the sustainability clubs at Black River High School, Holland High School, and West Ottawa High School to bring composting bins to their school campuses, but they are running up against the added cost for compostable food trays and the cost of having the food waste picked up and taken to a composting facility.

To justify those additional costs, the students are collecting data to understand all the costs involved in not composting. First, they will quantify how much food waste is going to the landfill. Students have been weighing and measuring the food waste at each of those schools. They will get a better understanding of how much waste the schools are contributing to the landfill, along with the methane it produces. Did you know that methane is more than 28 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere?

They also will compare the cost of Styrofoam trays to compostable trays. They will compare the cost of hauling food waste to a landfill to the cost of hauling it to a composting facility. And they will compare the cost to the environment. This project will be ongoing for a while.

Another project the committee worked on is insulating all outlets and switches located on the exterior walls of their homes. Proper insulation comes with numerous benefits, especially to Holland-area residents who experience intense Michigan winters and sometimes brutal summers.

In the winter, that empty outlet and switch space within the wall allows cold air from the outside to circulate inside. The more cold air that circulates inside a home, the more heat a homeowner will have to use, leading to additional spending on heating bills.

Conversely, the air-conditioned air from inside a home seeps out the empty outlets to the outdoors, causing homeowners to run their air conditioner more.

Proper insulation can prevent this unnecessary spending and make homes more comfortable. To properly insulate the outlets and switches, consumers should purchase foam inserts that insulate the space within the outlet and switch area. These inserts are affordable, just \$3 to \$5 for 20 pieces, and can be bought at local hardware stores. They're a great investment.

Just unscrew the switch plate, place the foam insulator over the gaps in the wall, and reinstall the switch plate. The Environmental Committee has even gotten City Hall to participate. This past month, the students insulated all the outlets on the exterior walls of City Hall.

When the students were asked what they thought about insulating the outlets at City Hall, the responses were, "It was so easy," "It didn't take long," "It was cheap," and "It only took a screwdriver."

Let that be a lesson to everyone.

- *Eva Sampedro and Betzie Arenos Valero are members of the Holland Youth Advisory Council. The council, made up of students from five area high schools, was formed to provide input to the City Council on youth-related issues.*