

# Interviews Connect Youth, Nature, Past 'EARTHY CONVERSATIONS' GUIDE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

When do you feel most connected to nature? What do you do to make our environment healthier? How has our environment improved lately?

How would you answer these questions? Are you interested in how a friend, family member or neighbor might respond? We are too!

Pierce County and the Chambers Creek Foundation are hosting *Earthy Conversations* to stimulate personal and community discussions about our experiences with nature and extraordinary learning. These conversations will help establish a direction for future environmental education throughout Pierce County.

### YOUNG INTERVIEWERS COLLECT STORIES

Since January, local students in grades 6-12 from over 20 different schools and youth programs have been learning about and practicing a particular style of interviewing designed to collect positive, powerful and personal stories from our individual past. Assisting the youth interviewers are adult coaches and mentors who sit in on each interview to take notes and help the student reflect on the outcome of the conversation.

Our goal is to gain a unique understanding of our community and its environmental aspirations. As more and more interviews are completed, common themes will begin to emerge and the individual interviews will begin to form a larger picture. In



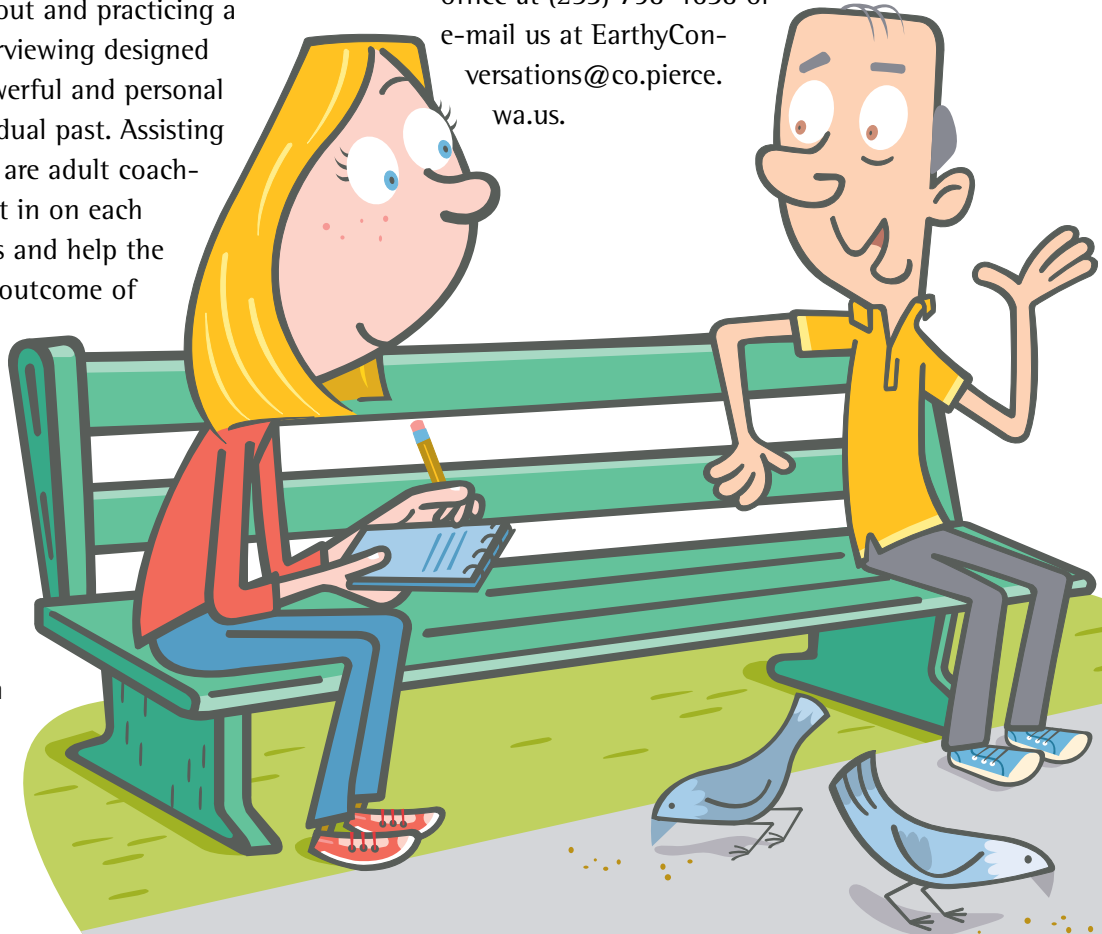
Student interviewers and mentors participate in "Earthy Conversations."

October, the interviewers, mentors and interviewees will gather to explore those common themes and begin to create an inspiring vision for the future of environmental education in Pierce County.

### INTERVIEWERS NEEDED

Please join us! We are still looking for motivated students to participate in this program. Trainings held in January, February and April were great successes and two more information and training sessions are planned for July and September. Students (and their parents) are encouraged to attend this event to learn how the process works and decide if they would like to participate in *Earthy Conversations*. Youth interviewers can earn 15 hours or more of community service.

For more information about *Earthy Conversations*, please contact the Solid Waste Division office at (253) 798-4658 or e-mail us at [EarthyConversations@co.pierce.wa.us](mailto:EarthyConversations@co.pierce.wa.us).



# Eco-labels can be Misleading

Consumers want to behave in ways that do not harm the environment. But a lack of reliable standards leaves them at the mercy of marketers for information.

“Greenwashing” is the term for activities that mislead consumers about environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product or service.

*All natural, green, non-toxic, environmentally safe, ozone friendly, chlorofluorocarbon (CFC)-free and biodegradable* are some of the common pitches made to attract customers. Vague terms such as “earth friendly” are used with no defined meaning. In other cases, promotional materials may tout an environmental benefit while leaving out the environmental harm a product can cause. These pitches are becoming more common as companies jump on the green-is-good bandwagon.

A recent study of 1,018 “green” products found that all but one was marketed with false or misleading eco-related claims.

Researchers from TerraChoice Environmental Marketing describe “Six Sins of Greenwashing” to watch for:

- **Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off**—e.g., toxic-loaded electronics touting their energy efficiency
- **Sin of No Proof**—no certifiable verification of green claims
- **Sin of Vagueness**—e.g., products claiming “all natural,” which could include hazardous substances that occur naturally
- **Sin of Irrelevance**—e.g., products claiming to be CFC-free even though CFCs have been banned for almost 30 years
- **Sin of Fibbing**—making false claims about certification

- **Sin of the Lesser of Two Evils**—e.g., organic cigarettes

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Be aware that label information may be misleading.

Governments and standard-setting bodies have tried to discourage greenwashing, but the marketing of “green” is at an all-time high and confusion reigns. Fortunately, tools are becoming available to help us evaluate the truth of environmental marketing claims.

## WIDELY ACCEPTED ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

The organizations listed below have evaluated products based on multiple environmental impacts:

- The collection of raw materials
- Manufacturing processes
- How a product is used
- How a product is ultimately recycled or disposed

Before earning certification, an independent third-party auditor must verify that products actually meet the publicly available standard.

*Note: The information below is not intended as an endorsement for these organizations. They are provided as reference points. Products certified by such organizations may still contain some toxic components, for example. Unfortunately, non-food product labels don't yet have a standard format like we see on food products.*

- **EcoLogo**: Certifies many product types, [www.ecologo.org](http://www.ecologo.org)
- **Chlorine Free Products Association**: Certifies paper and tissue products, [www.chlorinefreeproducts.org](http://www.chlorinefreeproducts.org)
- **Green Seal**: Certifies many product types and services, [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)
- **Forest Stewardship Council**: Certifies wood products from sustainably harvested forests, [www.fscus.org](http://www.fscus.org)
- **Green-e**: Certifies sources of renewable electricity and products generated from clean energy sources, [www.green-e.org](http://www.green-e.org)
- **Green Guard**: Certifies products based on indoor air quality issues, [www.greenguard.org](http://www.greenguard.org)
- **Energy Star Program**: Lists products meeting the federal efficiency requirements, [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)
- **EPEAT**: Ranks computer desktops, laptops and monitors into EPEAT Bronze, Silver or Gold categories based on more than 50 environmental criteria, [www.epeat.net](http://www.epeat.net)

## LOOK FOR ECO-LABELS

The Consumers Union—publisher of *Consumer Reports* magazine—has an online tool you can use to verify and learn about eco-labels on food, wood, personal care products and household cleaners. Visit [www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels](http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels).

