

Climb Against the Odds College Educators Proposal

Educational Objective: to highlight real world environmental challenges and issues through the window of several organizations' efforts to define the problems, engage in advocacy, and make their visions for breast cancer prevention and environmental safety live.

Audience for this content:

College students interested in a good story, one that highlights the issues surrounding the influence of environmental public policy, the social challenges of environmental studies work, and the growth of a movement whose ultimate goal has been the eradication of breast cancer. The DVD can be used as a single case study about the Breast Cancer Fund's approach to influencing public policy or as a starting point to discuss more general issues and considerations and factors contributing to the rising incidence of a disease within an increasingly unregulated environment.

Also notable for a college audience is the climbing team from the main feature film, Climb Against the Odds, Mt. McKinley, which features five college students from Princeton. Their presence adds drama and an additional perspective to the DVD.

Recommended courses for this material:

1. An environmental science, policy and management course which looks at the way our society responds to environmental problems, how policies get formed and how decisions are made in the face of uncertainty and opposition .
2. A social sciences course that looks at the roles of history and social context in teaching students how to recognize and evaluate problems, communicate strategically about them, and address how social science tools can be applied to environmental problems. Social science theories will contribute to understanding environmental problems. (added material; see below)
3. A course on environmental ethics that studies, for example, the issues raised by an organization that insists on an ethical response to environmental dangers, or an effort like biomonitoring which aims to monitor individuals and communities (added material, see below) or the rise of consumer philanthropy that puts consumer activity above prevention priorities (Pink Ribbon, Inc).

State Requirements for College Education in Environmental Science:

To be further explored and integrated.

Instructional Strategy:

Students will form groups to examine the context in which the fight for breast cancer prevention has taken place, and discuss key questions. Some possible frameworks that students can choose to deepen their understanding of this context include the following:

1. Review of Environmental Breast Cancer Movement, an article on alliance building and social challenges within the environmental breast cancer movement by The Ribbon,

Sabrina McCormick (Brown University), Phil Brown (Brown University), and Stephen Zavestoski (University of San Francisco).

2. Review of Pink Ribbons, Inc., a book whose authors question the outcomes of consumer philanthropy and putting corporate interest over community concerns.
3. Review of environmental chemical risks through two Bill Moyers transcripts
4. Review of Critical Issues in Biomonitoring, an examination of effective community practice (downloads from various sites).

Background Context:

General History: Beginning in 1995, a series of climbs were organized to help survivors and their supporters have an opportunity to deal positively with the occurrence and sometimes reoccurrence of breast cancer as well as to make known to the public the alarming upward spiral of breast cancer incidence across communities and in the world.

While prior to the climbs, the diagnosis of breast cancer was largely perceived as an unlucky draw holding no easy treatment and no cure, once the climbs began, a diagnosis led to giving those with the disease some sense of choice as they decided to do the climbs, met the challenges of raising funds, figured out their definition for success in climbing, and challenged individuals and organizations that continued to sidestep responsibility for environmental risks. They realized their strength to take action through a mission that inspired and through taking all things “one step at a time.”

Bolstered by the power of their metaphor--climbing against the odds-- the climbs engendered hope. They challenged the physical and mental capacities of those who climbed, and brought out strong determined voices advocating continued involvement in emerging environmental issues, and specifically toward public action—especially in the neglected area of identifying preventable causes.

From the lessons of these courageous women, we not only learn about human strength and endurance but also what is happening each year when the climbs occur--locally, state-wide, nationally, even internationally. The history of the broader movement to fight breast cancer is informative. In the early 30's, early efforts with breast cancer concentrated largely on male physicians promoting early detection and screening for uninformed patients who felt victimized in the face of a disease they could do nothing about. Seventy years later, increasingly aware breast cancer survivors, supporters and concerned professionals now lead the charge to ward off occurrence by spreading the word about environmental toxins identified as likely breast cancer risks, and by informing others about healthier practices. The Breast Cancer Fund, a leader in prevention, brings these critical identification efforts to the attention of legislators, public health agencies, educators and breast cancer organizations alike, with the idea that joined together, they can begin the task of assessing unhealthy toxins in our bodies, in the products we consume, and in the places we live, and thereby, reduce exposures. Bold actions taken one step at a time are now laying the foundation for the elimination of toxins in our environment and hopefully, the elimination of breast cancer.

Using the DVD:

What it takes to have become an effective voice in the public arena is significant. The contents of this DVD not only thrill us with the challenges the climbers take on but elucidate the evolution of the breast cancer movement: the efforts required to create change and the considerations that must be confronted to be effective.

The voices you'll hear run the gamut. From participants in the climbs themselves, to an activist writer, Sandra Steingraber and the press who get the word out, to philanthropists who give voice to new priorities, to scientists actively involved in measuring the levels of exposure in our bodies and communities, (Dr. Dick Jackson) to people talking about critical legislation, the information they share is an eye-opener on all that is required to ensure a healthier world.

Other content areas that could be used as a launch pad for further exploration include material on environmental exposures and risks, biomonitoring, psychological and social benefits of climb participation, media campaigns, activism, and the importance of community involvement in prevention efforts.

Additional material

The DVD includes content that may be useful in student reports, both on the DVD and through links to the Climb Against the Odds website.

DVD Content:

1. A feature documentary and several smaller segments on the different emphasis on the climbs and what they achieved.
2. The Hero's Tribute: a look at leading professional speaking at the Breast Cancer Fund, 2006.
3. How Far We've Come: A look at the history of the breast cancer movement with additional references that highlight the challenges in influencing public policy by various groups engaged in the fight against breast cancer (e.g. How Far We've Come and books by Sandra Steingraber and other current authors).
4. Vassar Environmental Risks Educational Tool: A look at the risks of environmental exposures to breast cancer during different stages of life.
5. Other links that highlight what is currently being done in the area of prevention: Nutrition and Health (Foods, exercise and other ways to prevent Breast Cancer through self-protection), Body and Product Toxin Information, Search Tools, and Environmental Toxins in the places we live.

Web links

These web links show content specific to ongoing studies, interventions or issues related to breast cancer. Here are some categories:

1. Biomonitoring: evaluating the presence of chemicals in our bodies and environment. Introduction to the legislative bills passed (Breast Cancer Fund) and various issues related to biomonitoring.

2. Examples of Current Research Study:

- a. Newton breast cancer study (Silent Spring Institute). Goal: to look at difference in high and low exposure areas re factors known or hypothesized to affect breast cancer. Questionnaire was developed that covered health history, individual characteristics, habits and home environments.
 - b. Household exposure to environmental pollutants study examining Richmond, CA and Cape Cod communities (Silent Spring Institute and Communities for a Better Environment Project). Goal: to link breast cancer advocacy and environmental justice in two communications that differ in racial/ethnic and economic character, to better understand exposure to EDCS in indoor environments and the relationship between indoor measurements and outdoor sources, to report environmental monitoring data to individuals and communities in ways that support empowerment and to develop guidance for report back by others.
 - c. Right to know study (Silent Spring Institute Project Supported by the National Science Foundation). Goal: to research right to know ethics and values in communicating environmental health study results to study participants as well as communities.
 - d. Green homes project study (Silent Spring Institute funded by the Hurricane Voices Breast Cancer Foundation). Goal: to assess whether product changes can reduce household exposures
 - e. Cape Cod breast cancer and environment study (Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, Massachusetts Department of Health, and Silent Springs Institute). Goal: a community-based participation epidemiological study that explored elevated breast cancer incidence on Cape Cod.
 - f. Adolescent and risk factors study (Zero Breast Cancer). Goal: to introduce a community based model for adolescents regarding the risk factors present in breast cancer. They helped develop peer-relevant content for prevention and engaged in a model for successful peer education.
3. Introduction to the Precautionary Principle (Breast Cancer Fund), and its importance to the effort to eliminate preventable causes.
 4. Introduction to challenging media campaigns to bring the public's attention to the rising incidence of breast cancer and the importance of prevention.
 5. Opportunities for future study: women with high exposures, exposures at different times in the life course, health effects that signal nascent biological damage from environments exposures, how genes affect the way our body processes pollutants, and risks from exposures to pollutants in the home, human studies of many more of the chemicals identified as mammary carcinogens and endocrine disrupters in lab research.

Bibliographic Resources

Books (See the Prevention Guide for more resources)

Silent Spring, Rachel Carson

Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What we Know and Don't Know about Cancer, Robert Proctor

Living Downstream: a scientist's personal investigation of cancer and the environment, Sandra Steingraber
Toxic Deception: How the Chemical Industry Manipulates Science, Bends the Law, And Endangers Your Health, Dan Fagin and Marianne Lavelle
Life's Delicate Balance: Causes and Prevention of Breast Cancer, Janette D. Sherman, M.D.
Pink Ribbons, Inc, Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy, Samantha King
Cancer-Gate: How to Win the Losing Cancer War, Sam Epstein
Altering Eden: The Feminization of Nature, Deborah Cadbury
When Smoke Ran Like Water, Tales of Environmental Deception and the Battle Against Pollution, Devra Davis
Human Bio-monitoring for Environmental Chemicals, National Resource Council
Environmental Bio-monitoring: Exposure Assessment and Specimen Banking, Subramanian and Iyengar, Editors
Community Organizing and Community Building for Health, Meredith Minkler
Community-based Participatory Research for Health, Meredith Minkler, Nina Wallenstein, and Budd Hall
Methods in Community-Based Participatory Research for Health, Barbara Israel, Eugenia Eng, Amy J. Schultz and Edith A. Parker
An Unreasonable Woman: A True Story of Shrimpers, Politicos, Polluters, and the Fight for Seadrift, Texas, by Diane Wilson
Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and Don't Know About Cancer, by Robert Proctor
Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana's Chemical Corridor, by Steve Lerner
Cancer: 101 Solutions to a Preventable Epidemic

Articles and Websites

Biomonitoring

www.commonweal.org/programs/brc

Body Burden information

www.ewg.org/reports/bodyburden1

Toxic pollution in your community

www.scorecard.org

www.environmentaldefence.com/toxicnation/resources/resources.htm

www.environmentaldefence.com/foodwatch/index.asp

Media Campaign Promoting Awareness about Environmental Exposure

[Breast Cancer Fund Billboard Campaign](#)

Transcripts:

[Trade Secrets Transcript](#) (see above)

[NOW with Bill Moyers](#): Are we poisoning our children?

Other Multimedia

* Exposure: Environmental Links to Breast Cancer (1997, Canada)

Winner of the best Health Documentary at the New York Independent Film Festival, 2001. The film stimulates change in communities, institutions and with health professionals locally, nationally and internationally.

* A Healthy Baby Girl . The film tells an older story about a woman given DES (covers the relationship between women's health, public policy, medical ethics and corporate responsibility)

* Rachel's Daughters: Searching for the Causes of Breast Cancer

Slide Shows:

[Biomonitoring: A Dialogue](#)

[The CDC's 3rd National Report on Human Exposure to Environmental Chemicals](#)