



**US Army Corps
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New York District

NEWS RELEASE

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New York and New Jersey Harbor Transforms into Outdoor Earth Day Classroom

Elizabeth, NJ -- More than 200 area students will join environmental community leaders throughout the region tomorrow, Apr. 20 to celebrate Earth Day at the Elizabeth Marina City Dock.

Students from St. Patrick High School, Elizabeth High School, Hamilton Middle School, Benedictine Academy and Albert Einstein Academy will spend the morning learning about the health of the New York and New Jersey Harbor Estuary, the effects of pollution and the everyday importance of Earth Day through interactive educational stations.

The stations will be manned by a variety of professionals in the academic and environmental field including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Coast Guard, the New York and New Jersey Baykeeper and Kean University.

"This fourth annual Earth Day event is a great opportunity to energize the students in Elizabeth, our future environmental leaders, about the health of their own estuary in the New York and New Jersey Harbor, and understand the connection between land and water," said the Corps of Engineers District Engineer, Col. Nello Tortora.

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“Students will have the opportunity to speak openly with Corps biologists, engineers, archeologists along with our partners in our estuary, to learn about the rich history of our harbor, its current condition as well as get a hands-on view of its marine life and ongoing port activities.”

The ER/AK Watershed Association Earth Day 2007 partners include the mayor of the City of Elizabeth, the Elizabeth Marina, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kean University and the offices of Sen. Robert Menendez, and Reps. Donald Payne and Albio Sires.

“The environmental educational workshops like Earth Day and Estuary Day are tangible manifestations of a year round commitment to environmental education and stewardship within our watershed school consortia,” said Michelle Doran McBean, CEO of Future City Inc., the non-profit organization that sponsors Earth Day and Estuary Day.

“The reason why this process is so successful is because for more than four years the Corps has made an active working partnership resulting in substantial inter-agency relationships that have created sustaining, complementary environmental education and stewardship programs for the Arthur Kill/Elizabeth River watershed communities.”

The Earth Day program will kick off with an environmental harbor inspection aboard the Corps' vessel, Hocking, where many students will sail on the Arthur Kill Channel for the first time. On the boat, students will learn about the historical significance of Shooter's Island, review the types of habitat in the estuary and receive an overview of significant ongoing activities to improve the watershed.

On the dock, students will visit stations that include visual exhibits such as touch tanks with marine life, as well as interactive pollution displays, water quality testing and life of an oyster. Students will also be able to tour a Coast Guard vessel and learn about pollution response and oil spills.

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"The men and women of the Coast Guard," said Captain Robert R. O'Brien Jr., commanding officer, Coast Guard Sector New York and Captain of the Port, New York/New Jersey, "have a special responsibility to ensure that our waterways remain safe and clean. We work closely with our partner, federal, state, and local government agencies, and the private sector, each day to investigate and respond to reports of pollution in our waterways.

"As we celebrate Earth Day again this year, I hope we take the opportunity to increase environmental awareness, especially with our young people since they are our future," he added.

This is the fourth annual Earth Day event that will be hosted by the Arthur Kill/Elizabeth River Watershed association. In conjunction with Estuary Day in September, to date, more than 2,000 area students have participated in the activities since its inception.