

Massachusetts Envirothon *Current Issue* Judging Guidelines

Thank you for volunteering to be a judge for the Massachusetts Envirothon! This is important and challenging work. These high school students have been researching and preparing for many months. With your assistance, their presentation will be a positive learning experience that will leave them with the desire to try even harder next year.

Please plan to arrive by 7:45 to attend the 8:00 judges briefing on the morning of the event. This is a chance to get oriented, ask questions, meet your fellow judges, and share experiences and coffee.

The following are some tips based on more than a decade of Massachusetts Envirothon judging.

1. Be encouraging and respectful.

- Be attentive. Smile! Treat each presentation as the brand new experience that it is.
- Remember that these young people will take praise and criticisms to heart, whether they show it or not. Your role is to be supportive in their learning experience.
- Try to ask at least one question of each team. Each judge should have an opportunity to ask a question.
- Provide positive feedback before asking your question. This makes for a good atmosphere.
- Treat each student's opinion with respect. Feel free to ask what they value and why - but do not judge them on this basis!
- The way they dress may be different from what you expect. Please look beyond first impressions in your scoring of their presentation.

2. Use the question period to promote the students' understanding of the issues.

- When asking a question, reintroduce yourself to the team and tell them what you do.
- Help to create an atmosphere where it is okay to say "I don't know" but not to try to bluff their way through an answer.
- Do not hesitate to correct errors of fact, but do it gently. You might begin with "It's my understanding that . . ."
- Ask them how they know what they know. They should be prepared to cite their sources.
- Ask them how they came to their conclusions. They should be prepared to explain their logic.
- Give them the benefit of your experience and judgment, but do it with a light touch and few words. No lectures!

3. Offer your best judgment in point scoring and review comments

- Teams may come to a different conclusion than you on a controversial issue. This does not make their conclusion wrong. Don't judge based on personal opinion!
- Judge the research and critical thinking they used to come up with their answers, not the values they applied.
- Some teams have had a more difficult task than others in researching their communities. Take such factors into account in your scoring.
- Copious comments on the score and review sheets are welcome! Be constructive. This is an important chance for them to get real world feedback. For example, if you find their dress or manner inappropriate (or exemplary), this is the place to provide advice and suggestions.

Thank you!