

## **THE PROGRAM**

The Los Angeles Environmental Learning Center at Hyperion (ELC) is a 20,000 sq ft. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certified re-purposed facility built by the City of Los Angeles, LA Sanitation that houses two galleries of educational exhibits and interaction stations that educates visitors on water conservation and climate change along with highlighting Sanitation's clean water, watershed protection and solid resources programs. The ELC also includes an 87-seat auditorium; recycled water irrigated green roof, solar panels, a wind turbine, a solar water heater, a terraced wetland fed with recycled water; and a 40-seat learning laboratory. The ELC is located at the Hyperion Treatment Plant in Playa Del Rey, CA, which is a perfect place for visitors to observe the important connection between municipal infrastructure (sewers and wastewater treatment facilities) and elements of the surrounding natural environment.

The building remodel and sustainable construction of the ELC (Phase 1) started on September 9, 2009 and was completed on June 29, 2011. The fabrication and installation of interactive exhibits and media (Phase 2) on 12,000 sq. ft. space started in July 2012 and was completed in June 2013. With a construction cost of \$11.5 million, visits to the ELC (and usage of the facility) are FREE of charge, and the public is encouraged to visit the ELC as often as they'd like to further their understanding of how to protect the environment. The ELC held its Grand Opening ceremony on September 16, 2013, and just completed its first year of operations with the goal of bringing 10,000 visitors to the ELC on an annual basis. The ELC is primarily targeted to City of Los Angeles residents; however, it welcomes visitors from all over the world.

## **PROGRAM GOALS & VISION**

The ELC's three main goals are: **(1)** Educate children and adults about sustainable water and solid resources management as a catalyst to change behavior; **(2)** Share information about the LA Sanitation's infrastructure, programs and people, and how they are improving the environment; and **(3)** Demonstrate green building practices through the renovation and operation of the building. The ELC meets these goals by providing exhibits aimed at teaching Los Angeles residents about the natural and urban water cycle, and solid resources management programs and services all in one location. The ELC's vision is to become the leading center for

environmental education while inspiring future generations to protect public health and the environment through their individual and collaborative commitments to conservation and environmental stewardship.

The City of Los Angeles dedicated the ELC to L.A. residents for the possibility of inspiring future generations to protect public health and the environment through sustainable behaviors and practices. As visitors traverse the ELC, they are encouraged to identify opportunities to take individual responsibility as environmental stewards, learn about various environmental careers, and make volunteer action in partnership with the City a part of their daily lives.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EXHIBITS**

### **First Floor Gallery – Clean Water and Watershed Protection Exhibits Gallery**

The ELC's Clean Water gallery offers many hands-on learning experiences that teach the science behind L.A.'s stormwater and wastewater management programs, and reveals the unseen connections between Sanitation's mechanical treatment systems and nature's ecosystems. With the ever increasing need to educate the public on California's severe draught situation, the ELC provides exhibits aimed at understanding the importance of the "One Water" concept which explains how our stormwater, wastewater, groundwater, and potable water are one and the same. In addition, visitors learn how water has sustained life on earth for millions of years and how we must not take our most precious resource for granted by protecting, conserving and cleaning it for beneficial reuse.

The gallery houses exhibits that showcase the importance of drought awareness through fun and interactive experiences aimed at bringing the concept of water conservation to a personal level with the visitor. Visitors exercise making smart choices about everyday activities that conserve water by visiting exhibit stations representing a typical home with a bathroom, toilet, sink, laundry and yard.

Visitors also explore ways to use recycled water and follow wastewater from their home and how its treated at one of L.A.'s four wastewater and water reclamation plants. Visitors will get a chance to study what happens when it rains, how billions of gallons of stormwater roar through our storm drain system, and learn how L.A.'s 35,000 catch basins intercept debris. The last stop (and most important) in the Clean Water gallery is a visit to our Promise Stations which are designed to encourage the visitor (and hopefully their families) to make environmentally conscious promises. For example, visitors may promise to take shorter showers, turn off the water while they brush their teeth, and/or participate in a neighborhood cleanup.

## **Second Floor Gallery – Solid Resources Exhibits Gallery**

The ELC's Solid Resources gallery offers many educational activities that illuminate the change from the focus on landfills to a network of facilities that recover waste materials, as well as how climate change has affected our environment and the importance of reducing our carbon footprint. Visitors to the gallery will discover the connections between the products they buy and use, the City's waste and recycling stream, and systems designed to help protect public health and the environment and how we can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with our consumption. Visitors walk through a Zero Waste Home where they learn how to live with conservation in mind; to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Visitors will exercise making choices about their everyday activities by testing their knowledge in composting, separating trash from recyclables, and disposing of household hazardous waste. Visitors also get a chance to view the mass volume of our endless waste stream, and are educated on the impact of reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering material we throw away. Furthermore, visitors also learn about a waste-to-energy technology called thermal recycling for processing trash and producing clean energy.

Through high recycling behaviors and improved disposal habits, visitors play a very important role in helping the City achieve its long term commitment of diverting as much as 90% of trash generated from the landfill by the year 2025. The last stop (and most important) in the Solids Resources gallery is a visit to our Promise Stations which are designed to encourage the visitor (and hopefully their families) to make environmentally conscious promises. For example, visitors may promise to use recycling and trash containers at home and at school, volunteer two hours a week to help improve their neighborhood and community, or use reusable bags when shopping.

## **THE LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY**

The ELC began public outreach and partnerships with various members of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the Los Angeles Trade Technical College, and the University of Southern California, other non-LAUSD entities including environmental and community groups with the expressed hope that the ELC can serve the local efforts of these organizations to incorporate the ELC in their respective environmental education programs and further environmental education. ELC staff members met with these organization's top

administrators to develop a priority list of approaches, and created an outreach strategy tailored to maximize utilization of the ELC facility and exhibits.

Currently, the ELC is partnering with LAUSD on its Drought Awareness Campaign to bring attention to the severe drought crisis in Southern California, and to recognize the communal responsibility for water conservation. The ELC has also partnered with environmental organizations such as Heal the Bay, and Los Angeles Conservation Corps as well as with community organizations such as Gang Reduction and Youth Development, the Salvation Army, Boy & Girl Scouts, D.A.R.E. and LA's Best to bring residents to the ELC as a part of their respective environmental education programs. These organizations not only receive tours of the ELC but also disseminate information to their participants in the ELC's Learning Lab.

An ELC website ([www.lacitysan.org/elc](http://www.lacitysan.org/elc)) was created to share information about the various exhibits and media housed at the ELC, highlight how ELC exhibits align with the State of California's Next Generation Science Standards and also invite visitors to learn about the ELC's sustainability features, schedule tours, and plan their visit. As a result of our outreach effort, over 1,200 entities have been contacted by ELC staff members, over 5,000 students have tour the ELC with the first 6 months of outreach, the ELC's interactive education content has been reviewed and approved by LAUSD, and over 2,500 students have visited the ELC from non-LAUSD sources. The ELC's goal 10,000 in its first year of operations was surpassed by accepting 14,630 visitors from September 16, 2013 – September 16, 2014.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the opening of the ELC to the general public, the City of Los Angeles, LA Sanitation has made significant contribution to environmental protection by providing a learning facility FREE to the community, where visitors learn, explore, and share their roles, responsibilities, and how essential they are for the future of clean water treatment and conservation, watershed protection, and solid resources management. Considered to be the first facility of its kind in California, the ELC is on the road to become the leading center for environmental education, inspiring future generations of environmental stewards. Each visitor to the ELC is encouraged to identify opportunities to take individual responsibility thus becoming eco-ambassadors who help protect public health and the environment and transform their neighborhoods to cleaner and greener places to live.