Pasadena Lab Hosts Up-and-Coming 'Toxic Crusaders'

For the second year now, young students visited DTSC's Environmental Chemistry Lab in Pasadena to learn how to become "Toxic Crusaders."

Dozens of children put on white lab coats and other protective gear for a day of science and hands-on learning. DTSC volunteers, including research and environmental scientists, industrial hygienists, and staff from Enforcement, Permitting, and Public Participation led the way.

From start to finish, lessons at the May 4 event guided the children along the roadmap that DTSC follows to protect people and the environment by investigating toxic hazards and documenting them through lab analysis. Activities included a mock Dumpster inspection and testing of children's jewelry for dangerous heavy metals.

"We do this for multiple reasons," said Bruce LaBelle, DTSC Research Scientist Manager. "One reason was for us to offer opportunities to these students so they can be inspired about science. Second, it's a great opportunity to connect with people in the community, as these students come from communities that are affected by our work. It helps them understand what we do, why we do it, and its value."

LaBelle said Toxic Crusaders, which is organized by Pasadena lab supervisor Mui Koltunov, also helps staff with team-building.

"Having them work together to create really good scenarios for the children requires them to think and really be passionate about helping kids. They're making science relevant in kids' lives," LaBelle said. "It's a great value to my folks and helps them think more about their own work and how meaningful it is." ■

DTSC VIDEO HIGHLIGHT

DTSC Research Scientist II Kenneth Neely explains (in just over three minutes) how the Environmental Chemistry Lab tests for lead using inductively coupled plasma optical emission spectrometry.

Left: DTSC Toxic Crusade volunteers. *Center and right:* Environmental Scientist Scott A. Giatpaiboon and Senior Environmental Scientist Jessy Fierro with budding young scientists.