

# The Inconvenient Youth: How a Clean Air Poster Contest is Changing Community Habits

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Since 2015, two professors from the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business and Extension Sustainability at Utah State University (USU) – Edwin Stafford and Roslynn Brain McCann – have held a poster-design competition for high school students obtaining their drivers licenses. This competition addresses a critical issue in the state of Utah: air quality. According to the Environmental Protection Agency’s air quality monitor, in recent years Utah has had some of the worst air quality in the United States.

In areas of the state like Cache Valley, where the poster contest originated, concentrations of particulate matter in the air often reach unhealthy levels. Despite these growing health concerns, the Utah population remains “apathetic or ambivalent about air pollution,” Stafford says. In a traditionally conservative state, conversations about sustainability and the environment tend to be unpopular. However, younger generations are typically more open to these discussions.

From one school in Cache Valley, the poster contest has grown to reach over 550 students in four school districts. Students combine environmental science, marketing, and art to design posters that educate students and other Utah citizens about air quality preservation. The Clean Air Poster Contest helps high school teens understand the pollution problems associated with their new driving privilege and has created a generation that is more aware of their personal impact on air quality and other environmental issues.

The Clean Air Poster Contest also has had another unexpected result on Utah’s air quality discussion. Statistical analysis by Stafford and McCann found that around 71 percent of parents said their kids discussed both the competition and air-quality issues with them. Additionally, around half of the parents who discussed the competition with their children decided to start changing their driving behaviors. According to Stafford, “... the vast majority of parents said that their teens’ influence

came about with a simple, rational conversation about air pollution or request to take action, and some parents reported even welcoming it.” This notion of teens changing their parents’ habits is titled the “Inconvenient Youth” effect by the Wall Street Journal.

Stafford and McCann have plans to continue expanding the Clean Air Poster Contest to more schools in and around the state of Utah. They also hope to find the most effective ways to bring important sustainability information home, where the “Inconvenient Youth” can champion societal changes not just in their generation, but also in other, less-accessible ones.

Three of the winning posters from the 2019 Clean Air Poster Contest are included below. The winning posters will be displayed at schools, businesses, and libraries across Utah for education outreach. You can read more about the Clean Air Poster Contest here: <http://cleanaircontest.usu.edu/>.

## Poster Content Award Winners

### Cache Clean Air Winner



### Inovar Winner



### Healthy Human Habitat Winner

