



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Environmental Excellence Awards Presented to Four Illinois Students at the Illinois Junior Academy of Science State Exposition

Springfield – Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) representatives from the Office of Environmental Education recently judged and selected four Illinois students to receive Environmental Excellence Awards at the annual Illinois Junior Academy of Sciences State Exposition.

The competition is hosted by the [Illinois Junior Academy of Science](#) and was held at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale April 24-25, 2026. Almost 900 Illinois student projects were selected to advance to this year's state science fair. Criteria for the Environmental Excellence Award include addressing the prevention of pollution, the remediation of air, land, or water, analyzing the effect of pollution on our environment, or innovative ways to prevent or address contamination in the environment. Four winners were chosen to receive an Environmental Excellence Award, which consisted of a medal, certificate, and a science kit to further their research.

This year's winners are:

Renee Catherine Vimal Raj

Individual member from Buffalo Grove

Grade: 8; Category: Environmental Science

Project Title: Chitosan Induced Flocculation for Microplastic Removal to Produce Purified Sea Salt

Purpose: To improve human health and quality of life by reducing microplastic contamination using a sustainable bio-based flocculant during the sea salt production process since salt is used in most foods.

Anders Schnell

Benjamin Franklin Middle School in Springfield

Grade: 8; Category: Environmental Science

Project Title: Can Waste Clean Water?

Purpose: To study if certain waste products can remove phosphates from water in a way that is efficient, cost-effective, and can have a two-way environmental benefit.

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Praveer Garapati

Research Methods Exploration from Bloomington

Grade: 9; Category: Environmental Science

Project Title: Design and Testing of a Low-Cost Autonomous Water Quality Monitoring Buoy

Purpose: To design a cost-effective continuous monitoring system for small streams and local lakes to help identify an increased potential of harmful algal blooms due to nutrient runoff and increase temperatures.

Ty Novosel

Quincy Senior High School in Quincy

Grade: 11; Category: Environmental Science

Project Title: Remediation of Bifenthrin Effects in Aquatic Organisms and Environments

Purpose: To design an efficient way to remediate the effects of bifenthrin, a neurotoxin that is commonly used in insecticides in residential and commercial settings that often washes off into aquatic environments.

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