

NIEHS-funded summer student wins President's award

By Joe Balintfy

May Wang, a 2013 NIEHS-funded Summer Research Experience Program (SREP) participant, received one of nine President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA) in an Aug. 12 White House ceremony. Wang's winning study, which was part of her NIEHS-funded research experience, tested how reusing activated charcoal can remove bisphenol A (BPA) from water.

"I was honored and inspired by the award ceremony," said Wang. "I was able to interact with the nation's leading environmental scientists and administrators, and my fellow awardees."

Since 1971, the President of the United States has joined with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to recognize students from across the nation for contributions to environmental education and stewardship. Sixty students received PEYA awards, some individually, some as part of a group. Wang received the EPA Region 3 award.

(<http://www2.epa.gov/education/presidents-environmental-youth-award-peya-winners>)

Region 3 includes Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C.



Wang, center, is shown with Field, left, and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, who presented the award at the White House. (Photo courtesy of Eric Vance, courtesy of EPA)

Linked Video

[Watch a video of senior White House and Administration officials honoring recipients of the PEYA. May Wang appears 8 minutes in and is recognized by EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy at minute 29:00. \(41:10\)](#)

Filtering out BPA

Wang's paper, Remediation of bisphenol A contaminants in water by reusing an activated charcoal filter, expanded on research begun by students who preceded her in the summer program. The study demonstrated that activated charcoal, used as a filter, is effective for removal of BPA and is active for a number of times after initial use, making it a potentially effective and economical method to filter BPA from wastewater. Using this method would improve overall ecological health and significantly decrease risk of exposure to BPA.

"May developed an assay for BPA and showed that [BPA] can be cleared using an activated charcoal filter," said her advisor, Jeffrey Field, Ph.D.,

(<http://www.med.upenn.edu/apps/faculty/index.php/p16384>)

at the University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine. "Her study was simple, but had highly convincing data and was very well written."

Student scientist

A student at Council Rock High School South in Pennsylvania, Wang worked with Field as part of the Teen Research and Education in Environmental Science (TREES)

(<http://ceet.wpengine.com/training-career-development/summer-programs/teen-research-and-education-in-environmental-science/>) program at Perelman, funded by the 2013 NIEHS SREP grant.

"TREES offered me a unique hands-on learning experience in environmental science that has expanded my understanding of the environment and has prepared me well to continue pursuing my passion for science," said Wang, who would like to collaborate with treatment facilities to implement her research findings.

"It's important that we attract young students and encourage them to pursue careers in science," added Mike Humble, Ph.D., the NIEHS health scientist administrator who oversees the program at NIEHS. "This is a great example of how a summertime opportunity can foster interest in research."

(Joe Balintfy is a public affairs specialist in the NIEHS Office of Communications and Public Liaison.)



According to Humble, SREP provides research experiences for high school and college students and for science teachers during the summer academic break. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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