

Looking To Girls For The Next Generation Of Engineers

(NAPS)—To fight a possible shortage of qualified workers in the engineering and high tech fields, a coalition of concerned public and private groups have come up with a unique plan: Target girls, a group that rarely considers a career in engineering. This year, as part of National Engineers Week in February, the coalition inaugurated the first annual "Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day."

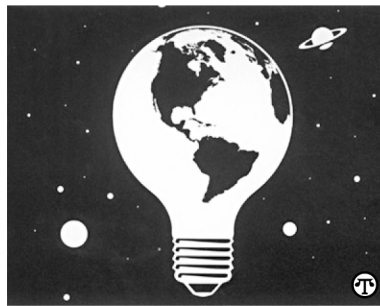
Attempts to diversify engineering are much more than just good public relations for the industry. Some see it as an economic imperative.

The lack of qualified engineers is already being felt in the nation's information technologies, which must recruit workers from outside the country to fill positions. The situation may get worse, with some predicting a "war for talent" between the United States and other nations—particularly the European community—as the pool of workers shrinks and demand grows. Further, America risks losing its economic and technological global preeminence if its citizens are not prepared to participate in the new, technology-driven economy.

According to federal studies, though, if engineering reflected the demographics of America's overall workforce, the increased numbers of women, under-represented minorities and people with disabilities would be enough to cover almost all new positions.

As part of the solution, girls are being specifically targeted in the hope that if their interests are piqued early, they will take sufficient math and science in grades 7-12 to enter engineering in college.

Few doubt the need for action. Currently, less than ten percent of all engineers working in America are women and women earn less than one out of five bachelor's degrees in engineering. "These trends are not promising, but we



can turn things around," says Linda Sanford, senior vice president at IBM and a longtime engineer.

If the first year's efforts of "Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day" are any indication, the impact could be broad and deep. IBM, for example, provided 3,000 volunteers for the initial launch, including almost 600 women in engineering and technology. The National Society of Professional Engineers, the program's other co-chair, mobilized more than 100 women engineers for the event, reaching more than 2,000 girls in grades K-12.

Other participating engineering groups included the National Academy of Engineering, MentorNet, Society of Women Engineers, Women in Engineering Programs & Advocates Network (WEPAN), the National Society of Black Engineers, Phillips Petroleum and AT&T. Girl Scouts USA served on the steering committee of the event and linked its headquarters and clubs to engineering organizations.

Many academic institutions participated, too, including Northwestern University, the University of Rochester and Carnegie Mellon University. Also, the National Coalition of Girls Schools initiated a particularly promising outreach program aimed at introducing girls to engineering.

For more information on "Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day" and other National Engineers Week programs, visit www.eweek.org.