

HUGH MORGAN: The environmental Education Council met in the capital today to rehearse the presentation they'll deliver in classrooms and meeting halls around the state beginning Monday. The first meetings will be in Marshall and Thief River Falls. Chairman William Miles hopes for a new level of environmental consciousness starting in the classroom. The plan that you suggest to deal with issues of the environment focuses on eight regions, doesn't it? What's the rationale behind that?

WILLIAM MILES: Mostly I guess ecological. In other words, in terms of an environmental. In terms of trying to develop materials that would be applicable and usable in different portions of the county, we felt it was essential that we develop these regions based on the ecology of the area that is the environment itself.

In other words, you're going to talk prairie problems or agricultural problems in southwestern or western Minnesota. You're perhaps going to talk forestry problems, predominantly in Northern or maybe southeastern Minnesota. You're going to talk about inner city and urban problems more in the Metropolitan area.

So it wasn't only ecological in terms of the outdoor environment, that is the natural resources. But ecological in terms of the house we live in. That is the environment for each individual. This is really why we picked the eight regions.

So often people get the idea that all right, here we're talking about being outdoors. This is an appreciation of the outdoors. Let's take a nature trail, a nature hike. Let's go look at birds. Let's meet our friend, the tree. These types of things.

And it is true that much of our curricular material is built around this rather attractive, rather easy, at least for the teacher type of material to handle with kids. But we do this for a specific purpose. And that purpose is to lead in to the greater discussion of issues relative to the environment.

HUGH MORGAN: How does a history teacher teach environment?

WILLIAM MILES: OK, the history teacher, of course, we appreciate the fact that the politics and history, the economics and history, the Industrial revolutions, these types of things are extremely important. We think that the environmental concerns and the environmental movements and the whole area of the use of the environment is every bit as important as the economics and the political and the philosophical.

And so what we're really talking about, I guess, is that hoping that the history teacher would incorporate into his or her course these things that are now especially with the tremendous populations that we have on this planet that are so important in terms of where we go in the future.

I'd say the same thing relative to the geography teacher. We talk about or the geography teacher talks about bushels per acre. Well, what's an acre? What's a bushel? How many of their kids know what a bushel is? How many of them have seen a bushel basket? How many of them know what an acre is?

Here he has a perfect opportunity to take those kids outside on the football field or the playground at school and say, all right, here's an acre, here's a half an acre. Give them some concept, or write in the classroom itself. We talk about density of people. So many thousands-- or so many people per mile. All right. So many thousand or million people per square mile at, say, in New York City. Well, we can measure density right in the classroom.

HUGH
MORGAN: William Miles says the council is not trying to build an environmental studies curriculum. And the council in its planning is deliberately not debating or stating environmental issues, rather it's building those eight regional commissions for Minnesota. So the program can stay local and flexible. Other local hearings on the Minnesota Environmental Education Plan take place during the next two weeks around the state. Newspapers will carry the date and place. This is Hugh Morgan.