PIKETON, Ohio — A group of Eastern High School students is helping the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) provide important information to the public while learning valuable skills and furthering their education and knowledge of the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

That was the message delivered by Portsmouth Site Lead Joel Bradburne to Eastern High School students during a recent ceremony recognizing their work on the plant’s Annual Site Environmental Report (ASER) summary.

The ASER report details site environmental conditions and remediation efforts. Administered by the Ohio University Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs through a DOE grant, the project engages high school students in summarizing the technical ASER report into a document intended for a public audience. The final ASER Summary will be distributed to the public in the fall of 2014.

Previously, Piketon High School students participated in the program during the 2011-2012 school year and Waverly High School students participated during the 2012-2013 school year. Western High School will participate in the program during the 2014-2015 school year.

“This report not only provides the public with valuable information, but has also led to some of our area’s young people becoming among the most informed stakeholders on the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant,” Bradburne said. “This effort is part of our educational outreach program that we believe has dramatic impact in our region. The tools they have developed through this program will be beneficial to them as they continue their pursuits.”

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Kaitlyn Thornsberry, a 17-year-old junior at Eastern, said the experience was enjoyable and she found the interactive demonstrations with subject matter experts valuable.

“I thought it would be stressful to do the project and keep up with Mr. (PJ) Fitch’s classwork, but it wasn’t like that. I found it to be very interesting,” she said. “I really liked all the people who came in and provided information and explained how they do things.”

The project was performed by Fitch’s chemistry class, which was divided into five teams to work on the various parts of the ASER. Fitch said it was gratifying to see the growth of his students as the project progressed.

“At first, the report was so technical that it was overwhelming to them and to me,” Fitch said. “We went from being able to read a sentence or two to me not having to assist them in the end to summarize the project. It was rewarding to see them interact when some of the areas overlapped. There was a lot of cross-group communication that was necessary.”

Margaret Hutzel, a senior project manager from Ohio University who managed the project, thanked those who played a role for their participation, including DOE, site contractors, Eastern High School (administrators, teachers, students and art department), and faculty from Ohio University and Rio Grande University.

Thornsberry said the project piqued her interested in the Piketon plant.

“My grandpa used to work there and now I ask him more questions about the site,” she said. “I’m more curious now.”

The student ASER summary and an associated video will be available when they are finalized at www.portsfuture.com.
Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant Site Lead Joel Bradburne, left, is pictured with faculty, staff and students of Eastern High School during an ASER Summary Project recognition ceremony conducted recently at the high school. Bradburne applauded the students' work and said the project puts them among the Portsmouth site's most informed stakeholders.

Photo credit: Deneen Revel, Fluor-B&W Portsmouth, LLC