

Dear Students and Citizen Scientists,

Included in the toolkit with this letter you will find the following materials to guide you through your photo evidence project:

- Process Overview and AQWA Links
- 35-minute Training Webinar and link for 4-minute “Protocol in Action” video
- 10-page Photo Taking Protocol, Checklist, and 2 Labeling Templates
- Data Entry and Scoring Instructions and Scoring Formula Workbook

How did the Assessing Quality of Water Access (AQWA) Photo Evidence Tool come about?

We, a group of researchers at the University of California and the University of Washington wanted to find a way to collect as much data as possible about drinking water access. But, individually going to schools across the country is expensive and time consuming. To make a project like this feasible, we imagined enlisting the help of citizen scientists. We then developed and validated the AQWA Photo Evidence Tool, making sure that it accurately captures drinking water access information when used by student scientists.

Why is water important?

- It is healthier to drink plain water than soda or other sugary beverages.
- Plain water as a main thirst quencher benefits oral health, cognition and mood and elimination of toxins from the body.
- Cutting back on sugary beverages can help prevent cavities, maintain healthy weight, and prevent conditions like diabetes.

But what if there is no access to free water in the places you spend most of your day? It’s difficult if the only appealing water is bottled water you have to pay for. When schools provide access to drinking water, it gives students a healthy alternative to sugary beverages.

Where does this photo-taking activity fit in?

When we performed our research, the students in our study used the tool to help show that the tool is valid. Now that it has been validated, the students we send the tool to – like you – can use it to make healthy changes in your schools and school district! You can play an important part in ensuring that drinking fountains and other water sources are suitable for drinking by being involved in this activity. The evidence you collect with the AQWA tool will establish facts about access to drinking water, that can then be used to make the case for improvements or more resources to address this problem. Imagine if students and schools across the country did what you are doing! This could lead to a lot more students drinking plain water at school and, therefore, students with better health.

Have fun and happy photographing!

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