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Jan 13, 2010 6:20 pm US/Central

Students Build Fuel Processor For Haiti School



Reporting
Mike Puccinelli

CHICAGO (CBS) — Long before the earthquake hit, a group of local high schoolers were thinking about how they could help people in Haiti. Now their labor of love is needed more than ever. CBS 2's Mike Puccinelli has their story.



1 of 1 [Click to enlarge](#)

Kim Schmidt talks about how she and nine other members of the Mother McAuley Eco Max Club built a biodiesel fuel processor for a school in Pichon, Haiti. Now she and the other team members fear that school is no more.

"We don't know if the school is still standing, if people have been injured, if colleagues are OK," said Roz lasillo, Mother McAuley science department chair and project leader.

It's uncertainty that has given the project a new sense of urgency and importance.

"It's a really saddening experience. But hopefully when we ship this over, it'll be of some help to them and they can start over," said junior Ana Vazquez.

Initially, the plan was to ship the biodiesel generating unit in the spring. But now, in light of the human catastrophe in Haiti, the girls say they want to move up the date.

"This was a really unexpected event, so the sooner we can get it there the better because they really need help," said senior Mary McDonnell.

And what Haitians really need right now, according to experts, is fuel, which the \$2,000 solar-powered machine can produce for free from seed oil that comes from an indigenous plant.

The oil is created from weeds that grow all over Haiti. The by-product of the oil manufacturing process is glycerin, which will also be used to replenish the country's deforested land.

The girls built the unit by working 10-hour days during their Christmas break. Now they realize that their hard work was a small sacrifice compared to the widespread misery being

Ten members of the Mother McAuley Eco Max Club built a biodiesel fuel processor for a school in Pichon, Haiti.
 CBS

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experienced by young students right now in Haiti.

"It makes you feel a lot better about yourself knowing how much this machine is needed and how much it will actually help people," said junior Kim Schmidt.

The entire construction process was videotaped. Club members say they will send a videotape and a manual to Haiti so that the people of Pichon can build biodiesel units themselves.

The solar-powered unit is capable of producing 45 gallons of fuel every few days.

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