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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Idaho science fairs to go virtual in 2021

Registration deadline rapidly approaching

BOISE, Idaho (Dec. 21, 2020) — Typically staged in Boise, Coeur d’Alene, and Pocatello each spring, the 2021 Idaho Science and Engineering Fairs will take place virtually this March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Jan. 15 registration deadline is fast approaching.

According to the Idaho STEM Action Center, the science fairs are open to any Idaho high school student and registration is free. Participants must submit an official abstract for their research project, a brief presentation, and a one-page project summary. They may also include an optional video 1-2 minutes in length.

The science fairs feature 300-400 projects annually from the eastern, northern, and western regions of the state in six categories: Animal, biomedical, and microbiological sciences; behavioral and social sciences; earth, environmental, and plant sciences; physical sciences; engineering; and math, computer science, and embedded systems.

Students in each region vie for more than 50 medals and certificates. Females entering computer science projects are eligible for the Bearden Awards, which include \$500 cash prizes for the top CS-related project in each region. And The Lewis Corporation Engineering Award offers a \$250 cash award for the best engineering project at each regional science fair.

During the month of March, participating students will present their projects to a panel of judges via videoconference. Two Best of Fair winners from each region will move on to compete in the Virtual Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair in May.

The STEM Action Center has grants for educators to support students participating in the science fairs. Visit STEM.idaho.gov/apply for more details.

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The STEM Action Center is also seeking judges for this year's competitions. Adults interested in judging research projects and providing students with invaluable guidance should email Idaho science fairs director Merrie Rampy at idahosciencefairs@gmail.com.

According to STEM Action Center interim executive director Dr. Kaitlin Maguire, competitions like these are important to the state's future, offering students opportunities to engage in original research projects aligned with their interests and meet and learn with other motivated students in their area.

"The quality of the research that Idaho students present each year never ceases to amaze me," Dr. Maguire said. "Although our science fairs are virtual this year, the awards still have the same merit. And the experience students will gain by participating — by thinking critically about real-world problems, seeking solutions, and explaining their findings succinctly — will prove invaluable when they enter the workforce."

In addition to facilitating critical and creative thinking, problem solving, innovation, and collaboration, she said 19 of Idaho's 20 hot jobs through 2026 require STEM skills and that STEM jobs pay more than twice as much as non-STEM jobs.

The 2021 Idaho Science and Engineering Fairs are presented by the STEM Action Center in partnership with the NASA Idaho Space Grant Consortium, Battelle Energy Alliance, Micron, Cradlepoint, Power Engineers, Applied Materials, and Lewis Corporation.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov/isef for more details, including project guidelines and key dates.

About the Idaho STEM Action Center

The Idaho STEM Action Center was created in 2015 because Idaho citizens are not entering the STEM pipeline fast enough to meet current and future Idaho workforce needs. Its goals are to increase equitable access to STEM opportunities, align education and workforce needs, and amplify awareness of STEM throughout Idaho. The organization is working with industry, government, educators, and students to develop new resources and support high-quality professional-development opportunities to foster a STEM-educated workforce that ensures Idaho's continued economic prosperity.

Visit STEM.idaho.gov for more information, and visit <https://STEM.idaho.gov/support-us/foundation> to make a tax-deductible donation to the Idaho STEM Action Center Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to enhance the investment the state has made in Idaho's STEM community. Contributions provide greater access to STEM camps for children, student competitions, and many other life-shaping programs.

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