

Spring Challenge 2026 - Solar Ovens

Competition at School Sites

LEVEL: Middle School / High School

DIVISION(S): No divisions, will just be 3 winners per school – 1st, 2nd, 3rd

COMPOSITION OF TEAM: 2-4

OVERVIEW:

Solar cooking is the simplest, safest, most convenient way to cook food without consuming fuels or heating up the kitchen. For hundreds of millions of people around the world who cook over fires fueled by wood or dung, and who walk miles to collect firewood or spend much of their meager incomes on fuel, solar cooking is a clean, economical alternative.

Additionally for millions of people who lack access to safe drinking water and become sick or die each year from preventable waterborne illnesses, solar water pasteurization is a life-saving skill. The World Health Organization reports that in 23 countries 10% of deaths are due to just two environmental risk factors: unsafe water, including poor sanitation and hygiene; and household air pollution due to solid fuel use for cooking.

With this in mind, each contestant will construct a solar oven, harnessing the natural energy of the sun to heat water to the highest temperature possible in an efficient manner.

MATERIALS:

Materials are limited to the following. Any additional materials not on this list will result in a disqualification.

- Cardboard (any kind)
- Aluminum foil
- Plastic wrap
- Tape
- Black paper or black paint
- Thermometer (for testing)
- Mason jar (for testing)
- Glue or hot glue

GENERAL RULES:

1. The students' full name, grade level and school name must be clearly labeled on the solar oven.
2. All parts of the solar oven must fit into a 60 cm by 60 cm by 60 cm cube. No parts including any extendable hoods/levers may extend beyond the allocated space during inspection or during competition.

3. The oven must be able to support an 8 oz mason jar filled in with 150 mL of water.
4. When placed in the solar cooker the jar must be fully supported and stable. Spilled water, unstable jars, and lack of support will lead to disqualification.
5. Judges will designate Solar Zone predetermined before the competition, where the participants will be instructed to position their solar ovens. Teams may position their solar oven in ANY orientation, as long as it stays WITHIN the Solar Zone.
6. Digital media (e.g., photos, video recordings, etc.) will not be accepted for arbitration purposes.

JUDGING:

Your MESA advisor must schedule a testing day at your school. MESA Advisors – please contact Pacific MESA to schedule this.

1. Solar ovens will be weighed before testing and be given a post it to write their names on.
2. Judges will inspect solar ovens at check in to check size, materials and stability specifications. Disqualified teams cannot place.
3. MESA Advisors must determine a solar testing zone prior to the competition.
4. Solar oven testing time will begin at the same time for all students and will last 20 minutes.
5. Teams will be given a pre-filled mason jar with a lid.
6. Before the competition timer starts, teams can set up their solar cooker within the solar zone wherever they would like.
7. Students **must** remove the metal lid from the jar before putting into the cooker.
8. When the competition lead says START each team will place their mason jar within their solar cooker.
9. After 20 minutes the competition lead will stay “TIME IS UP”. All mason jars must be removed at that time. Failure to remove jar when time has been called may result in disqualification.
10. Teams must stick their post it on the front of their mason jar and bring them to the judging area for their temperatures to be measured.
11. Judges will insert their temperature probes in the jar and measure the water temperature until a stable water temperature has been reached. The temperature will be recorded to the nearest half degree in Fahrenheit.
12. Judges will record the temperature in their judging rubric.
13. The highest temperature will determine the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place winners. Winning teams will be announced after all scores are recorded.
14. Because temperatures will be rounded to the nearest half degree, ties are likely. Ties will be broken by the weight of the oven, with the LIGHTER the oven the better.

SCORE RECORD BY TEAM:

Team Member Names:

Solar Cooker Weight	Solar Cooker Temperature
<i>(Tie breaker) The less weight the better</i>	<i>The higher the temperature the better</i>
Weight in Grams:	Final Temp in Fahrenheit: