When I started graduate school last fall, I attended a week-long orientation program for new teaching assistants. As part of the program, the hundreds of new graduate students were split into groups of 15-20 students and one group leader, a current graduate student, for an hour each day. These meetings were designed to encourage discussion on different topics from unruly students to good places to eat around Kent. During one of these meetings, each of us were required to present a 5 minute “micro-presentation” to our group. I had the perfect idea for my presentation.

Whenever I am asked “What do you do?”, my response of “I am a geologist” is almost always followed by the response “Oh! That’s…interesting.” Yes, the pause is there, along with a puzzled look on their face as if to ask “What on earth can you do with that?” The reaction people have upon finding that I am a geologist inspired my micro-presentation topic for that week: Geology in Everyday Life. I felt that most people do not realize just how much geology plays a vital role in the things they do on a daily basis. By giving a quick background in just a few broad areas of practical geology, I hoped to gain some awareness and, perhaps selfishly, a little more respect than is typically given to geologists.

Keeping in mind this was a 5 minute presentation (and therefore very brief) and to a small group of students who knew little to nothing about geology, I’d like to share my topic with you:

“I have worked as a geologist for the past five years. Does anyone here know anything about geology or what geologists do?” Only one student raised his hand. It just so happened that he was beginning his PhD. in geology.

“In that case, it seems obvious that most of you don’t realize how much geologists contribute to your everyday life. During my presentation, I will describe a few broad areas of geology and some of the benefits you enjoy on a daily basis.”

“Geology is, at a very basic level, the study of the earth. A little more specifically, a geologist studies the materials with which it is made, the processes that act on these materials, and the history of the planet. But how does this benefit you?”
I then wrote three words on the white board: Environment, Engineering, Energy. “These are three areas in which geologists are involved. I will describe a little part of what a geologist does for each of these industries.”

“The typical environmental geologist is involved with pollution control. They may test soil, air, and/or water for pollution and conduct clean-up of contaminants. This is what my job required me to do. I was involved mostly with remediation projects of gas stations where I’d determine if petroleum had leaked into the soil and/or groundwater, how much was released, where and how fast it spread, and many other factors before deciding on the best remedial method. This affects you because it cleans the environment you live in and, more directly, pollution like this may enter your drinking water and food sources if left unchecked. Environmental geologists look at all types of contamination, even on a global scale: i.e. – global warming.”

“Engineering geology is the area that I will be studying more in-depth during my time here at Kent State. An engineering geologist works with other professionals, such as civil engineers, to oversee
the planning and construction of bridges, roads, tunnels, dams, and even landfills. Engineering geologists are experts in rock strength, slope stability, and soil mechanics.”

Hoover Dam

“Finally, economic geologists are of great value to us all. They search and help mine and exploit earth’s resources such as oil, natural gas, coal, precious metals and gemstones.”
“These are just a small percent of the things geologists do which really do affect us all. The glass of clean water you drank this morning, the gasoline you used to drive here, the roads you traveled and the bridges you crossed, Jenine’s new diamond ring.” Jenine was recently engaged. “Somewhere along the line, a geologist helped make these possible for you to enjoy.”

Once again, this was a brief introduction to geology meant to give very basic information on how this area of study is part of your life, whether you think so or not. The students claimed it was very informative and provided a lot of insight into something they knew nothing about. While I know most of you know a bit more than they did, I hope to some of you, this was just as informative.

Source: http://adventuresingeology.com/2010/03/06/geology-is-your-life/