

Study: Teens optimistic about innovation

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BOSTON, Massachusetts (AP) -- Teenagers have some seemingly high expectations about what technology might bring over the next decade, according to a new Massachusetts Institute of Technology study.

For example, 33 percent of teens predicted that gasoline-powered cars will go the way of the horse and buggy by 2015. Just 16 percent of adults agreed.

Meanwhile, 22 percent of teenagers predicted desktop computers will become obsolete a decade from now, while only 10 percent of adults agreed.

Adults, on the other hand, were far more certain about the demise of the landline telephone by 2015 (45 percent made that prediction) than teenagers (17 percent).

The teens queried also said new inventions -- over any time frame, not necessarily by 2015 -- can solve such global problems as unclean water (91 percent), hunger (89 percent), disease (88 percent) and pollution (84 percent). Adults were less optimistic about hunger, with 77 percent saying technology will play an important role.

Merton Flemings, who heads the Lemelson-MIT program that conducted the survey, said he was encouraged that teenagers believe science and technology may hold answers to our biggest issues.

"It's the young people who are going to have to do it," he said.

But he also wonders whether enough of today's teens are in position to invent such solutions, noting that engineering was teens' third-most attractive career choice, picked by 14 percent as the field that most interested them -- and just 4 percent of girls. Only 9 percent of all teens said they were leaning toward science.

The top two career choices: Arts and medicine, each picked by 17 percent of the kids surveyed.

The Lemelson-MIT program, which focuses on encouraging young people to pursue innovation, commissioned its "invention index" in November, interviewing 500 teens and 1,030 adults nationwide. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 4 percentage points for teens and 3 for adults.