

Women are very much underrepresented in engineering and in engineering education programs and then of course, down the road, in the engineering workforce.

So only about twenty percent of engineering undergraduate degrees go to women, and then only about nine percent of working engineers are women.

Mary Mattis of the National Academy of Engineering says the EngineerGirl website aims to reach young women around ages eleven through fourteen, when they are just getting old enough to start thinking about their futures.

We know from the research that middle-school girls are at a critical point in their lives, and that it's a time when we need to reach them, both with an understanding, increasing their awareness of interesting fields in engineering, what a wonderful productive and exciting career you can have as an engineer.

But we also need to reach them at that time because you have to take certain courses, and you can't start thinking about taking those courses when you're a junior in high school.

Engineering is a demanding course of study - there is a lot of science and mathematics, and for many girls - and boys, for that matter - that can be intimidating.

But Ms. Mattis says that the EngineerGirl website stresses that engineering can also be fun and exciting.

It's about designing things, it's about changing the world for people, it's about making a difference. And, in addition, you can make a good living, you can be independent economically by becoming an engineer. All of those things are messages that girls need to get.

While most engineers go into traditional fields such as mechanical and electrical engineering, the EngineerGirl site also highlights unusual engineering careers in fields such as sports engineering and - believe it or not - chocolate engineering.

There's a section called 'why be an engineer,' and that talks about the many opportunities and increasingly different opportunities like with bio-engineering and environmental engineering, some fields that might appeal to girls who want to make a difference or have a meaning for their careers beyond earning an income.

Even if you are not a girl in the target age group, there's a lot of interesting information on the site, including biographies of some notable women engineers.