

FORTY YEARS OF

Earth Day

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Table of Contents

Chapter One	
Growing Awareness	1
Chapter Two	
Earth Day Takes Shape	2
Chapter Three	
A Day for the Earth	3
Chapter Four	
New Laws, New Learning	4
Chapter Five	
Earth Day Around the World	5
Glossary	6

Growing Awareness

During the early 1960s, Americans started paying more attention to the **environment**. They saw dirty water and smelled polluted air. They noticed that animal **habitats** were disappearing. Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. **senator** from Wisconsin, was concerned, too.

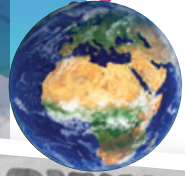
Senator Nelson wanted to make a difference. He decided to take steps to bring about positive change. Senator Nelson began speaking to Americans about the importance of protecting the air, water, and wild places. On his travels, he saw young people taking part in antiwar **protests**. He thought it would be a good idea to get Americans to do the same kind of thing for the environment.



Air pollution in the 1960s



Senator Gaylord Nelson



Poster for Teach-In

Chapter Two

Earth Day Takes Shape

In September 1969, Senator Nelson made an important speech. He called for a big event in which people could share their hopes for a cleaner environment. He said the event would take place the following April. He called it “a nationwide teach-in on the environment,” with the main aim being to educate people.

Senator Nelson’s idea caught on. It was reported on television and in newspapers. The senator formed a small staff to organize the day. People called and wrote to Senator Nelson asking how they could help. They started to plan local events. Children, teens, college students, and adults from all walks of life helped out.

A Day for the Earth

Kids sweeping in
New York City on
the first Earth Day →



← A rally in Philadelphia
on the first Earth Day



The first Earth Day was April 22, 1970. In all, 20 million people took part. In some places, the event lasted several days. Girl Scouts in Wisconsin handed out 40,000 **booklets** called “Household Action,” which showed simple things people could do at home to protect the environment. In New York City, a busy street was closed to cars, and about 100,000 supporters gathered there and formed a “human jam.” Speeches, art shows, and classes were held all over the country.

People led tours of polluted areas in their hometowns to expose the bad conditions. In New Mexico, students marched at a smelly **sewage plant**. A mother in Philadelphia took people on bus tours to **refineries**. She showed them how the refineries were putting smoke and **soot** into the air.

New Laws, New Learning

Earth Day was a big success. The U.S. Senate named the third week of April “Earth Week.” Later in 1970, the Clean Air **Act** became law. In 1972, the law that was passed to protect clean water was made stronger. This law became the Clean Water Act in 1977. In 1973, Congress passed the Endangered Species Act to protect animals and plants in danger of **extinction**. In all, the government passed 28 laws to protect the environment during the 1970s. Children began to learn about the environment in school, too.

Schoolchildren learning about the environment →



Wind farms make energy without burning anything. They help keep the air clean.



← An Earth Day
bicycle rally in India



Solar cooking →

Chapter Five

Earth Day Around the World

Earth Day has grown into a worldwide event. It is celebrated in more than 180 countries. People of all ages join in, just like people did on the first Earth Day. Kids plant trees and pick up trash on Earth Day. They learn about **green** activities like **recycling** and **solar cooking**, put on plays, and make art about the Earth.

The Earth Day theme for 2011 was “A Billion Acts of Green.” The aim was to do a billion things to help Earth. Children in India staged an Earth Day bicycle **rally** and flew kites printed with green messages. Students in China cleaned up a beach where sea turtles lay their eggs.

What do you think Earth would be like if people did these kinds of things every day? It might be a cleaner, healthier place!

Glossary

act: law written and passed by Congress and signed by the President of the United States.

booklet: small book.

environment: place where living things live, including air, water, earth, and open spaces.

extinction: death of all members of a species, so that there are no more left.

green: describing an activity or product that is healthy for the earth.

habitat: place where a group of plants and animals live.

protest: to express that you are against something.

rally: gathering of people for a cause or purpose.

recycle: to make trash into new products that can be used again.

refinery: place where oil from the ground is made into gasoline and other products.

senator: lawmaker who serves in the Senate, one of the houses of Congress in the United States.

sewage plant: place where dirty water is cleaned so it can be returned to the environment.

solar cooking: cooking food in ovens that use only the heat of the sun.

soot: black powder that is produced by burning things in factories and comes out of smokestacks.