



# Fact Sheet

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania • Department of Environmental Protection

## Learn About Earth Day Earth Day is Celebrated on April 22 Every Year

Earth Day is an annual observance, held on April 22, to increase public awareness of the environment. Each year on Earth Day, millions of people throughout the world gather to clean up litter, to protest threats to the environment and to celebrate progress in reducing pollution.

Former U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin) is credited with being the founder of Earth Day. His idea for increasing environmental awareness began in the early 1960s as a suggestion to President John F. Kennedy that the president conduct a five-day conservation tour to bring environmental issues to the public's attention. This suggestion was made at a time when the public was hearing that the Great Lakes were dead, reading Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and learning of the misuse of pesticides and their devastating impacts to the environment and watching news reports of the first catastrophic oil spill from a supertanker (the grounding of the *Torrey Canyon* off the coast of New England).

Despite this appropriate climate, the senator's agenda moved slowly at first. Then, while the senator was touring the Western states speaking about conservation efforts, he thought about using the anti-war teach-in tactics of the day to bring more attention to environmental issues. In September 1969, Sen. Nelson announced that there would be a national environmental teach-in on college campuses and elsewhere in the spring of 1970. A law student, Denis Hayes, helped to organize one of these teach-ins after going to Washington, D.C., to interview Sen. Nelson. Hayes is still involved in the national Earth Day movement.

An overwhelming response helped to create that first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. It was estimated that 20 million people were involved. Folk singer Pete Seeger performed at the Washington Monument. In New York City, cars were banned from Fifth Avenue to accommodate events there. Public speeches, parades, marches, rallies and

teach-ins on college campuses launched this contemporary environmental movement. The first Earth Day was the largest focused demonstration in history at that time. The U.S. Congress closed its doors and many politicians went home to attend local events. The U.S. Congress responded, creating the Environmental Protection Agency and enacting numerous environmental laws to protect air, water, land and wildlife. Now, Earth Day is a globally celebrated effort to bring attention to the environment. You can read more about the history of Earth Day in Senator Gaylord Nelson's own words at [web.mit.edu/bruceand/EarthDay95/history.html](http://web.mit.edu/bruceand/EarthDay95/history.html).

No one single organization "owns" Earth Day. Nationally, there are several organizations that have formed to promote Earth Day.

In Pennsylvania, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has traditionally declared an Earth Day theme and assisted the Pennsylvania Center for Environmental Education in distributing environmental education information to schools and others. DEP also maintains a calendar of Earth Day events. Across Pennsylvania, many agencies and organizations celebrate Earth Day with special events and activities.

For Earth Day 2001, DEP's theme is "Clean Watersheds! Clean Water!" Educational products designed for the event include a poster which helps students understand their role in helping to keep their watershed clean.

### What You Can Do

1. Support a local environmental group of your choice to help improve a local or regional environmental condition.
2. To save water, repair leaking faucets, showers and toilets. Install flow reducers and faucet aerators where possible. Reduce water use in

your garden by covering beds with compost or mulch and try to use soaker hoses and drip systems instead of sprinklers. The water being saved reduces the amount of additional water that must be cleaned and supplied to you. Cleaning and supplying water has an environmental and economic cost.

3. If you cut your own grass, buy a mulching mower. The mulch will fertilize your lawn instead of being wasted in a landfill. If you have a small yard, consider a person powered reel-to-reel mower or an electric mower. These mowers are quieter and don't emit pollution.
4. Plant trees in your neighborhood. Trees provide shade in the summer and may offer protection from winter winds. Trees also help to clean the air, provide shelter for animals, soften noise and beautify the community.
5. Reuse your grocery store bags the next time you shop and choose products that are recyclable and also products made from recycled materials. Don't forget to plan those shopping trips and other errands to get more done in fewer car trips!
6. Using energy is what the average person does that creates the most pollution! Whatever you can do to reduce your use of energy will be helpful. Shop for new appliances based on low energy use, turn down the thermostat a bit, add a sweater or insulation and look for ways to combine getting exercise with saving energy!

## Resources for Earth Day

"Earth Day Network 2001" -- a national effort focusing on cleaner energy and sponsoring an event on the Mall in Washington, D.C., hosted by Leonardo DiCaprio. Visit the website at [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net) to learn more.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency -- maintains an Earth Day homepage listing events and organizations at [www.epa.gov/epapages/earthday/](http://www.epa.gov/epapages/earthday/)

All Species Project -- has ideas for organizing neighborhood events at [www.allspecies.org/](http://www.allspecies.org/)

National Parent Teacher Organization -- has ideas for organizing school events and activities at [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org). The information is only posted seasonally. It may be necessary to search the site.

National Parks and Conservation Association -- Learn how to become involved at your local national or state park at [www.npca.org](http://www.npca.org)

DEP -- Pennsylvania's environmental regulatory agency has free Earth Day products (while the supply lasts -- commonwealth residents only, please) and activities related to the theme. Visit our website at [www.dep.state.pa](http://www.dep.state.pa) (directLINK "Earth Day"). You may also call the Earth Day line at (717) 783-6397, write to us at P.O. Box 2063, Harrisburg, PA, 17105-2063 and visit the DEP/DCNR Environmental Education and Information Center at 400 Market St. in Harrisburg, Pa. This center is located in the Rachel Carson State Office Building, on Market Street across from the public train and bus terminal. Electronic access at [ra-elearningcenter@state.pa.us](mailto:ra-elearningcenter@state.pa.us)

GreenWorks Channel -- Visit the Internet site listed in the box below to access environmental information and to find out what you can do.

This fact sheet and related environmental information are available electronically via Internet. For more information, visit us through the Pennsylvania homepage at <http://www.state.pa.us> or visit DEP directly at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose directLINK "Earth Day").



[www.GreenWorks.tv](http://www.GreenWorks.tv) - A web space dedicated to helping you learn how to protect and improve the environment. The site features the largest collection of environmental videos available on the Internet and is produced by the nonprofit Environmental Fund for Pennsylvania, with financial support from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 877-PA-GREEN.