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United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of
Public Awareness (A-107)
Washington DC 20460

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November 1977

Women and the Environment... Women as Agents of Change

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Dear Friends and Colleagues.

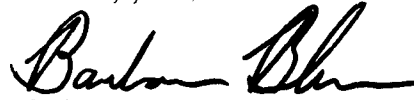
The work of the United States Environmental Protection Agency is directed towards achieving balance between human activities and the ability of nature's systems to sustain life. Many of these air, land, and water systems are being endangered because of pollution.

We cannot succeed in the monumental task of cleaning up the environment and preventing pollution without the help of every citizen.

Since our creation in 1970, we have worked with State and local governments, citizen organizations and countless private individuals to inspire public support and participation. We believe that women, who traditionally have exercised the caretaker role in society, have special skills and can make a considerable contribution to meeting environmental challenges.

We are proud to relate to the concerns of women. As an agency we take pleasure in honoring women who have pioneered in environmental protection and we earnestly enlist the active support of all women for the arduous jobs ahead.

Sincerely yours,



Barbara Blum
Deputy Administrator

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
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Women and the environment are closely bound. Throughout history, women have been immortalized as powerful symbols of nature: Mother Earth, Earth goddess, Demeter and Ceres, the Greek and Roman goddesses of agriculture and fruitfulness, Artemis, Moon goddess and controller of the ocean tides. We have embodied nature, as man has symbolized organized society. It is clear that women as bearers and conservers of life, as those who first guide children, should be foremost in dedication to the environmental cause.

Where do we stand now? Our Nation and our world are facing compelling, complex, and seemingly unresolvable environmental questions. The issues of air pollution, water quality, toxic substances, noise levels, nuclear radiation, public health, conservation of wildlife, and food supply in an increasingly populous world loom, ever larger as we come to understand that we cannot by the mere exercise of our wills transcend the hard realities of our world.

Nature's resources are finite. Where are new resources to be found? Decisions must be made about what we want and what we can have in this world. What are the trade-offs to be made and are we willing to make long-term readjustments in our life patterns? Women must be involved in every aspect of these policy decisions.

Women have the opportunity to bring a new sensibility to bear on environmental policies. We have made great gains in our struggle for equal opportunity for jobs and education. We have challenged the stereotypes of women's abilities and appropriate role behavior. Ours has been a different historical experience than men. Consequently, women have a distinct world-view reflected by their roles in society and their value system.



Women as Homemakers Linked to the Environment

By the nature of their traditional roles, men and women have experienced the environment in different ways. The male has functioned in the "open" world, a place where resources were *seemingly endless, waiting upon his domination, and the only* limits were those self-imposed. The woman has worked as a homemaker, as a manager of time and resources within a clearly defined sphere, the parameters of which are fixed. To create and sustain a household, she has dealt with limited quantities of money, food, and other necessities.

Today, our recognition that our planet has a fixed capacity to sustain life is what every homemaker long has known. Home, whether that of the individual, of society as a whole, or of all other creatures, is a place of infinite complexity but of finite resources. Woman's awareness of this seeming paradox gives her a useful insight in finding solutions to environmental problems.



Women as Consumers Linked to the Environment

As consumers, women have a powerful potential in environmental policy decisions. In the United States, women determine how the consumer dollar is spent, as they shop for themselves, their children or their husbands. The relation between consumerism and natural resources is a critical one. National policies in the United States are determined largely by economic power. What we decide to consume determines what wastes are returned to the Earth's air, water, land, and all the other biotic systems that absorb and convert pollution. What we consume determines who is employed and who is not, and at what level and skill. What we consume determines whether we become precariously dependent on imported resources, how rapidly we bankrupt domestic resources, how fast we use up the world's fossil fuels, and how much time we have to permit the development of alternate, renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and geothermal systems. Finally, our consumer power determines whether this nation can make an orderly transition from fossil to other fuels or whether massive dislocations and scarcities will occur. We may well determine the future of the environment by whether or not we are caretaking consumers.



Women as Health Custodians Linked to the Environment

Women well understand the impact the environment has on health. Women use health care facilities in this country two and a half times as frequently as men do. We are the primary custodians of children's health.

Women's health is affected directly by a number of the toxic chemicals in widespread use. Many women show concentrations of DDT in their breast milk. DES (diethylstilbestrol) that a generation ago was medically prescribed to prevent miscarriages in women, and more recently has been used as an animal feed supplement, now is being scrutinized as a possible health hazard. DES contamination has been implicated in breast cancer, fibroid tumors, and excessive menstrual bleeding. The environmental risks posed to pregnant women and fetuses are of special concern, and these hazards now are being investigated and assessed. With women's input, choices between economic expediency and health will be resolved in favor of health and future well-being.



Women as Environmental Activists and Professionals.

As environmental activists, women have made profound contributions. We have brought fresh eyes to the problem because we have been less enmeshed in the economic hierarchy. For example, in Japan, in the late 1950's it was women who led the struggle that ended the Minamata disease, that claimed hundreds of lives and inflicted suffering on hundreds more as a result of organic mercury poisoning. A small group of women in the poor fishing village of Minamata launched an attack on the large Chisso Corporation, demanding financial compensation for the victims and their families, a halt to the dumping of mercury wastes in the bay, and major readjustments in the industrial process. It is of the utmost significance that this battle to force the Chisso Company to end a health hazard to the community was won by nonmanagerial female employees.

Individual women have led the way in the environmental movement. In 1958, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, began an investigation of pesticides, primarily DDT. *Silent Spring*, a book that told of the effects of chemical pesticides on nature's biological order, was published in 1962. It produced a revolution in environmental thinking. Today, many women, professional and activists, cause society to focus on major environmental issues.

Women must become even more informed and involved at every level of environmental decision-making: as scientists, deciding upon research priorities and strategies, as political activists, sounding the tocsin of alarm, as administrators of public and private agencies, as homemakers with a special understanding of limited resources, as caretaking consumers, using purchasing power to exert pressure on producers, as custodians of life, demanding that health concerns be given top priority. With every role that we assume, we bring a special set of sensibilities, values, and strengths.

We, as women, must be agents of change for an environment that will reflect our commitment to health, well being, and the future.





Agents of Change in the Environment

EPA takes this opportunity to honor women who have been in the forefront of environmental change in many ways. This list is neither complete nor definitive. It is but a partial listing of women recommended by their peers. There are many, many more.

We would like this roster to grow and reflect those who by their spirited involvement and commitment to protecting the environment will lead us closer to achieving quality of life.

Barbara Reid Alexander	Lady Bird Johnson
Jean Auer	Mildred Leet
Nancy Bartlett	Merle Lefkoff
Barbara Blum	Michele Madoff
Lee Botts	Mary Ann Massey
Shirley Briggs	Gladys Mead
Marjorie Carr	Margaret Mead
Torey Casler	Mary Meyers
Claire T. Dedrick	Patsy Mink
Elizabeth Dodson-Gray	Mary Nichols
Gwen Douglas	Joan Martin Nicholson
Antoinette Downing	Maureen O'Connell
Louise Dunlop	Holly O'Konski
Marion Edy	Marion Parks
Mollie Featheringill	Ida Murphy Peters
Helen Fenske	Lola Redford
Peg Garland	Lucy Smethurst
Mary Louise Hancock	Mary Sinclair
Ellen Stern Harris	Sylvia Troy
LaDonna Harris	Char White
Joan Hayes	Beatrice Willard
Hazel Henderson	Joan Wolfe
Jean Hennessey	Jane Yarn
Celia Hunter	

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