

**The good things  
in life used  
to be free**



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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More than a century ago, an Indian chief named Sealath wrote these words in a letter to President Franklin Pierce:

"There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the leaves of spring or the rustle of insect's wings . . . The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench. What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, men would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth."

Belatedly, Americans have come to realize the prophetic nature of Chief Sealath's view, and to look back with nostalgia at the pristine state the Nation once enjoyed. The relatively minor and localized environmental problems of the mid-nineteenth century have become widespread in our day. The growth of technology, and the spread of its by-products—chemicals in the air and water, refuse, and noise—have all aroused concern over the dangers of pollution to public health and well-being.

To deal with these matters in a comprehensive way, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was established on December 2, 1970, bringing together in a single agency the major Federal environmental control programs.

Creation of EPA climaxed years of increasing public debate over how to protect the health and welfare of Americans from the unwanted and sometimes hazardous effects of our industrial



society, and how to preserve our natural systems and environmental heritage.

During previous decades some notable local progress had been made, such as the pioneering work on atmospheric smog in California and the cleanup of Pittsburgh's soot-laden skies.

But gradually we began to realize that local ordinances could no longer cope with many problems. The publication of Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*,

the Santa Barbara oil blowout, and the Torrey Canyon tanker disaster had dramatized environmental issues in the 1960s. Even more important to the average man were everyday problems such as auto exhaust fumes, unhealthy and unsightly open dumps, untreated sewage, and the hazards of many chemical products whose impact on his health and welfare was unknown.

By 1970 public agitation for new national environmental controls was intense, reflecting the widespread belief that air and water and land could no longer be used as a free dumping ground, that no private interest had the right to despoil the environment.

To deal with the problem, EPA changed the approach to a broad, national and cohesive effort and was provided by Congress with far-ranging powers to carry out its responsibilities.

The Agency's mission is to control and abate pollution in the basic areas of air, water, solid waste, pesticides, noise and radiation. While some of EPA's authority was contained in the original Presidential Executive Order, Congress

subsequently increased this authority with the Clean Air Amendments and the Resource Recovery Act in 1970; the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments, the Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act, the Noise Control Act, and the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act—all in 1972; and the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974.

EPA administers these laws through its Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and ten Regional Offices, supported by laboratories and field stations located across the country. More than 9,000 persons are employed by the Agency, the majority of them in the field. The Agency's annual budget exceeds \$740 million.

As an independent Agency, EPA from the outset has used both incentives to encourage clean-up efforts and law enforcement to curb polluters.

An example of how EPA supports local pollution control is its wastewater treatment construction grants, one of the largest Federal programs in history. Between 1972 and the end

of Fiscal 1977 EPA will commit nearly \$18 billion in Federal funds to help localities achieve clean water, a measure that also will create hundreds of thousands of jobs. In its air programs, the Agency has hundreds of scientists, engineers and other specialists to conduct research, measure air pollutants, and work with State and local agencies. The solid waste management program supports demonstration projects in several cities to convert trash to fuel for heating and electric power generation. And the pesticides program is engaged in an effort to help certify workers so that they can apply chemicals safely on farms and ranches.

At the same time, EPA has pursued vigorous enforcement action against polluters. Between its establishment in 1970 and the end of 1974 the Agency brought more than 6,200 enforcement actions against violators of air, water and pesticide pollution laws. Fines and penalties imposed totalled more than \$9 million.

In its reports to Congress, EPA over the years has made clear that the cost of cleaning up the



environment will not be cheap. At the same time, repeated public opinion surveys have shown that Americans are willing to pay for cleaner streams and purer air.

In some cases, the dividends are immediately apparent. For example, the damage of \$11.2 billion annually from just two air pollutants, sulfur oxide and particulates, is more than double the amount needed to control them. Based on research and development work by EPA, it is estimated that if the trash in our large cities was burned as fuel, it would provide the equivalent of 150 million barrels of oil a year.

But many of the benefits of improving the quality of life cannot be reduced to a simple price tag. As EPA Administrator Russell E. Train has declared, "A longer life span, the easing of pain from illness, the conservation of the beauty of our land, air and water—we can only use our best judgment in assigning dollar values to these things." Such benefits often are more meaningful in the long run.

The Nation can point to signs of progress in the battle for a cleaner environment since EPA was established. Monitoring data show nationwide declines in three air pollutants—carbon monoxide, sulfur oxides, and particulates. Current auto standards for carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons represent a reduction of nearly 85 percent from cars made before 1968. Great Lakes water quality is improving, and many rivers are cleaner as a result of EPA enforcement activity. The use of two controversial pesticides, DDT and aldrin-dieldrin, has been banned. By 1980, at least 25 cities will be involved in some phase of resource recovery of municipal trash. And EPA has established a noise standard for big trucks and is working on several more for airports, locomotives, and other sources. These are just a few of the achievements, and more are on the way.

The public has shown a deep and continuing commitment to the cause of improving their quality of life. As the Roman poet, Ovid, declared nearly 20 centuries ago: "Nature has made neither sun nor air nor waves private property; they are public gifts." As long as Americans understand that and are willing to work to protect and preserve their natural environmental heritage, the cause will persevere.





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