

50 YEARS OF EARTH DAY

1970

FIRST EARTH DAY

1 Billion

INDIVIDUALS MOBILIZED FOR ACTION EVERY EARTH DAY

190+

COUNTRIES ENGAGED

IDEA FOR THE FIRST EARTH DAY

Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson came up with the idea for a national day to focus on the environment after Nelson, then a U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, witnessed a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, in 1969. Inspired by the student anti-war movement, Senator Nelson realized that if he could infuse the energy of anti-war protests with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution, it would force environmental protection onto the national political agenda. Senator Nelson announced the idea for a “national teach-in on the environment” to the national media and recruited a 25-year-old named Denis Hayes from Harvard as national coordinator. Hayes built a national staff of 85 to promote events across the land.

1963

Senator Nelson accompanies President John F. Kennedy on a speaking tour around the U.S. to raise awareness about environmental issues; however, protecting the environment remains a low priority for most politicians and citizens.



1969

Inspired by the “teach-ins” held by Vietnam War protestors, Senator Gaylord Nelson announces the idea for Earth Day, a large-scale, grassroots demonstration against the degradation.



THE FIRST EARTH DAY

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans — at the time, 10% of the total population of the US — took to the streets, parks and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment in massive coast-to-coast rallies. Thousands of colleges and universities organized protests against the deterioration of the environment. Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, urban dwellers and farmers, business and labor leaders. By the end of 1970, the first Earth Day led to the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts.

April 22, 1970

20 million people participate in activities for the first Earth Day in the United States

1972

Congress passes the Clean Water Act, which limits pollutants in rivers, lakes and streams.



December 1970

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is established by President Richard Nixon in order to protect human health and safeguard the natural environment—air, water and land.



1973

Congress passes the Endangered Species Act to protect animals and their ecosystems.



EARTH DAY GOES GLOBAL

As 1990 approached, a group of environmental leaders approached Denis Hayes to organize another major campaign for the planet. This time, Earth Day went global, mobilizing 200 million people in 141 countries and lifting environmental issues onto the world stage. Earth Day 1990 gave a huge boost to recycling efforts worldwide.

1990

140 countries The 20th anniversary of Earth Day, celebrations go global



Bill Clinton awarded Senator Nelson the Presidential Medal of Freedom — the highest honor given to civilians in the United States — for his role as Earth Day founder.



2000

Earth Day 2000 sent world leaders a loud and clear message:

Citizens around the world wanted quick and decisive action on global warming and clean energy!



2007

40,000 people attend

Capacity crowds attend Green Apple Festival Earth Day events in New York City, San Francisco and Chicago.

10,000 Earth Day events

Earth Day Network members host events around the world.

2010

In honor of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day a climate rally and concert is held in Washington, D.C. - Earth Day Network brought 250,000 people to the National Mall for a Climate Rally and introduced a global tree planting initiative that has grown into The Canopy Project. Earth Day Network also launched A Billion Acts of Green® — the world’s largest environmental service project — and engaged 75,000 partners in 192 countries.



2018

Swedish teenager and climate activist Greta Thunberg begins protesting in front of Swedish Parliament with a sign: “School Strike for Climate.” Her protest to raise awareness for global warming catches the world by storm and by November 2018, more than 17,000 students in 24 countries are participating in climate strikes.



2019

The United Nations Climate Summit takes place in New York City. It finds that “1.5 degrees is the socially, economically, politically and scientifically safe limit to global warming by the end of this century,” and sets a deadline for achieving net zero emissions to 2050.

zero emissions by 2050

50 YEARS OF EARTH DAY

The 50th anniversary of Earth Day is centered around the theme of “climate action” in honor of worldwide efforts to halt global warming. Earth Day is known as the largest secular observance in the world, marked by more than a billion people every year as a day of action to change human behavior and provoke policy changes.

April 22, 2020

50th anniversary of Earth Day.

Waste 360™