

An Overview Of Earth Day

By ELIZABETH J. STEUDEL

In 1970, mainstream America was not very interested in the environment; however, in 1962, Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" began a concern for public health and the environment. That same year, a huge oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, motivated Gaylord Nelson, a US senator from Wisconsin, to initiate a "National Teach-In on the Environment" in schools and colleges, building on the student anti-war protest energy to make air and water pollution a national political issue. Dennis Hayes, a Harvard graduate student, dropped out to organize students and existing activist groups. This grassroots movement included rich and poor, farmers,

laborers, Democrats and Republicans. The teach-in was renamed Earth Day. Earth Day 1970 led to creating the National EPA and to the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species acts.

By 1990, Mr. Hayes and others took Earth Day global, involving 141 countries and 200 million people. This boosted recycling and helped set the stage for the UN Earth Summit in Rio. By 2000, the emphasis was on global warming and clean energy. Using the Internet, thousands of groups in 184 countries were involved. Hundreds of thousands gathered on the Mall in Washington, DC, to demand action from world leaders. By 2010, progress was challenged by climate change de-

niers, well-funded oil lobbyists, reluctant politicians and a less interested public.

The Earth Day Network was established to promote activism and environmental protection worldwide. It recently initiated a one million-tree planting program and set a goal of One Billion Acts of Green—the theme for Earth Day 2011. The Bourne Recycling Committee urges residents to do a "green act," such as changing light bulbs or planning an Earth Day event. There are 85 million pledges for such actions on the website, A Billion Acts of Green, so far. If you want to add your pledge, explore that website.

(Ms. Steudel is a member of the Bourne Recycling Committee.)

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