



# History of Environmentalism

*modified from <http://www.radford.edu/~wkovarik/envhist/>*

# Environmental issues have surfaced throughout human history.

- public health
- conservation
- preservation of nature
- smoke abatement
- municipal housekeeping
- occupational disease
- air and water pollution

# Ancient Civilizations



**before 1200  
AD**

- **Air pollution** was common in large towns– from dust, wood smoke, tanneries, animal manure and other things
- Ancient Rome was notorious for **sewage**-filled streets
- **Timbering stripped** the forests of Babylon, Greece, Lebanon and Italy as civilization rose.
- The **wood energy crisis** led Greeks to use passive **solar energy** by orienting their cities and houses toward the sun
- **Soil conservation** was not widely practiced. China, India and Peru understood the long term impact of soil erosion and tried to prevent it

# The Middle Ages & Renaissance



- Plague devastates Europe, leads to the beginnings of a public health system
- **Timbering in the forests** of England, France, Germany leaves totally stripped land, forcing a switch to **coal**
- Occupational **diseases** are investigated, begin to recognize **public health problems**

**1200-1750**

# The Era of Enlightenment



- **Reason** overtakes superstition.
- Ben Franklin's fight against **water pollution**. Movement to clean up waterways, slums and prisons.
- Thomas Malthus predicts that eventually, **food** and **resources** will run out as **populations explode**.
- New technologies create new **pollution**.

1750-1830

# The Industrial Revolution



- **Living conditions** in urban areas horrify reform-minded commissions.
- Pure drinking **water** and **sanitation** is spurred by epidemics of typhoid and cholera
- **Smog** episodes begin killing residents of large cities like London.
- Conservation of wilderness areas begins with the killing of an enormous tree, called the "**Mother of the Forest**".
- **Water pollution** carried disease, John Snow, traced a part of the cholera epidemic to a contaminated water pump in 1855.

**1830-1890**

# The Progressive Era



- **Reform** was a common concern for **working conditions, slum housing, food poisoning, sanitation, drinking water, polluting industries** and more
- Teddy Roosevelt and his forester Gifford Pinchot characterized the era with ideas about conserving large tracts of land and putting other forests to "**wise use.**"
- John Muir opposes the "**wise use**" idea and fights for outright preservation of unspoiled wilderness
- New organizations like **women's clubs** and the **Sierra Club** are formed.

**1890-1920**

# The Roaring Twenties & The Depression



- **National Coast Anti Pollution League** is formed. Concerns about oil and sewage pollution. **International oil dumping treaty passed by Congress** in 1924.
- Harvard M.D. **Alice Hamilton** describes Charles Kettering of General Motors, as “nothing but a murderer”; Hamilton's fight to point out alternatives.
- **Civilian Conservation Corps** is founded by FDR during the depression.
- The “**chemurgy**” movement replaces petroleum with farm alcohol. Other industrial uses for agricultural crops begins.

**1920-1940**



# World War II & The Fifties



- **Synthetic rubber** and **chemicals** from renewable resources proved vital to winning WWII
- “A Sand County Almanac” by **Aldo Leopold** is published in 1948. Expresses the expanding sense of human responsibility.
- **Deadly smog** episodes in Pennsylvania, London, New York, and Los Angeles. Air pollution crisis is underway. 1955 the first **international air pollution conference** is held.
- **Increasing CO<sub>2</sub>** buildup reported by Scripps Oceanographic Institute scientists.

**1940-1960**

# The Sixties



- Rachel Carson's book "**Silent Spring**" pesticides are killing the birds.
- Senate hearings in 1965 reveal falsified **lead industry research** by the gasoline companies and General Motors
- June 22, 1969, **oil and chemicals** in the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio catch fire
- UNESCO conference on "**Man and His Environment**" takes place in San Francisco in 1969.
- "**The Tragedy of the Commons**" by Garrett Harden argues that unregulated industry could turn the planet in a wasteland

**1960-1970**

# The Seventies



- The Environmental Protection Agency (**EPA**) is formed
- **Air pollution** is cut back. (catalytic converters on new cars that use only unleaded gasoline)
- Water pollution is greatly decreased through a massive **sewage treatment expansion program**.
- **Toxic chemicals** become more troubling.
- **Nuclear power safety** increases. (Three Mile Island accident).
- Energy crisis in oil supply.

**1970-1980**

# The Eighties



- Bhopal mass **poisoning** in India; the Chernobyl **nuclear** reactor disaster in Ukraine; and the Challenger shuttle and Exxon Valdez **oil spills** in the U.S.
- **Ozone depletion** from fluorocarbons is finally taken seriously, Montreal Protocol in 1987 is signed.
- Legislation for **cleaning up toxic waste** passes Congress.
- The **Rainbow Warrior**, a **Greenpeace ship** bombed by French secret service agents in New Zealand in 1985.
- Warnings about **global climate change** become more convincing as evidence mounts.

1980-1990

# The Nineties

- **Earth Summit** occurred in Rio, Brazil in 1992. The world leaders agreed to combat **global warming**, **protect biodiversity** and stop using **dangerous poisons**.
- **Global Warming:** CO<sub>2</sub> gas, released from burning fossil fuel like gasoline, diesel, coal, oil and gas was causing the planet to **heat up**.
- Lack of landfill space leads to the beginning of **recycling** bins. Green products grew in numbers at the supermarket shelves.



# The Present 2000-2012

## ■ **Assignment:**

- Find 5 Environmental Impact that has occurred between the years 2000-2012 and Explain how it impacts the environment.