

Our Earth. Our Responsibility.

by Tom Jorling

Co-drafter of the original Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.



MHTL is pleased to present this first in a series of pertinent articles prepared by Thomas Jorling, a distinguished attorney who recently joined the MHTL Advisory Board. Tom was the co-drafter of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, which formed the cornerstone of national efforts to keep our environment sustainable. We believe that you will find Tom's ideas important and helpful.

The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970 and has been celebrated annually ever since. The 1970 event was part celebration, part protest, part citizens petition for action. It was not an event in a single place but was carried out all across the country and has been characterized as the largest outpouring of citizen engagement in history.

In order to understand fully the origins of Earth Day, it is necessary to consider the state of the country immediately before and in 1970. In 1968 the nation was convulsed with the Viet Nam war, President Johnson's declination to run for re-election, and two horrific assassinations, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. The people all across the country were also observing and experiencing rapid deterioration of their environment. The air in cities was foul, the waters had become akin to sewers. There were oil spills, a river in Ohio even burned. In 1969, from his vantage point on the moon, Neil Armstrong gave the world a photograph of the blue dot in space we call earth. It fundamentally changed our perception of our place in the universe.

There was throughout the country a hunger for demonstration that things were not out of control and that something positive could be done to reverse the pervasive feeling that things were going to hell in a breadbasket. Sensing an opportunity, there were many leaders who had the vision to take the angst of the public and turn it to a force for change and that change was around protection of the earth, health and the environment.

Among those leaders were Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and Representative Pete McCloskey from California. They took the initiative and approached the leadership of several foundations and conservation organizations with an idea to focus the positive energy of the people around the theme to protect mother Earth. The idea jelled around sponsoring grassroots events all across the country; events not just to lament the sorry state of affairs, but to celebrate our home, the Earth. It was hoped such a celebration would inspire actions at the local, state and federal level to reverse the trends of environmental degradation occurring throughout the country.

The idea caught on and an organization was created to carry the concept into action. Two outstanding young leaders and organizers were selected to provide energy, inspiration and administrative skill to translate the idea into action; Denis Hayes and Barbara Reid. And translate they did. The result was an outpouring of participation and engagement that saw events at almost every town, city, state capitol, university, college even high schools all across the country as well as the nation's capitol. And on April 22, 1970 what happened in size, scope and participation exceeded even the wildest dreams of the organizers.

Clearly a national nerve was struck and Earth Day and the energy it unleashed became part and parcel of the congressional and state action that produced the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act in 1972, among many additional statutes directed at improving the quality of our environment.

The fact that Earth Day is repeated annually underscores the fact that protecting the earth is not a one-time action. There are new challenges ahead of us: the ozone hole, climate change, habitat loss and species extinction, among others, which require vigilance and continued action.

The legacy of Earth Day is a signal of hope that we can protect the Earth, this blue dot in space, most likely the only life sustaining biosphere in the universe, and assure that future generations will enjoy a high quality of life.

Should you have any questions or require assistance, please contact Arthur Murphy at amurphy@mhtl.com.

For further information about Tom Jorling's professional career, please see our website <https://www.mhtl.com/attorney/thomas-jorling/>. For further information about MHTL and articles and advisories on other topics which may be of interest, please visit www.mhtl.com.

MHTL sends a Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers out there!

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