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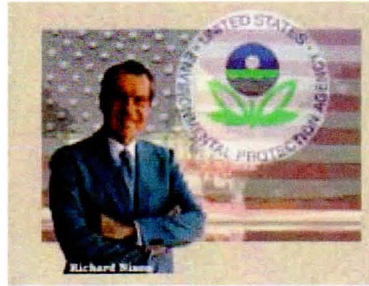
Region 10: the Pacific Northwest

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History of Sustainability

Creation of EPA and NEPA

In the United States, the first establishment of a national policy for environmental sustainability came in 1969 with the passage of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) whose purpose was to "foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations."



On July 9, 1970, amid a growing public demand for cleaner water, air and land, President Nixon submitted to Congress a reorganization plan proposing the establishment of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as an independent agency in the executive branch of the federal government. The plan proposed bringing together 15 components from five executive departments and independent agencies.

On December 2, 1970, the EPA began its operations, assuming responsibility for carrying out federal laws to protect the environment. Stated broadly, the job of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is to improve and preserve the quality of the environment, both national and global. EPA works to protect human health and the natural resources on which all human activity depends.

Stockholm Conference

Another major event of the 1970's was the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (known as the Stockholm Conference) held in 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden. During a 1971 preparatory meeting for this conference, developed nations expressed concern about the environmental consequences of increasing global development, while nations that were still developing raised their own continuing need for economic development. Thus the concept of "sustainable development" was born out of an attempt to find a compromise between the development needs of the nations in the Southern Hemisphere and the conservation demands of the developed nations in the North.

The conference heightened awareness of the global nature of environmental problems and set in motion events that lead to the general acceptance of the idea of "sustainable development" as a means of realizing the developmental needs of all people without sacrificing the earth's capacity to sustain life.

United National Environmental Program (UNEP)



Out of the Stockholm Conference, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was formed with a mandate to promote the idea of environmentally-sound development. Based in Nairobi, Kenya, UNEP

provided the UN with an agency to examine the world's growing environmental and development problems with a view to making recommendations to national governments and international bodies on appropriate actions. Eventually the work of the UNEP helped launch, among other things, the International Environmental Educational Program (IEEP) in 1975 and the World Conservation Strategy in 1980.

World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) "Brundtland Commission"

On December 1983, Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Prime Minister of Norway, was asked by the Secretary General of the United Nations to chair a special independent commission, the World Commission on Environment and Development known as the WCED. Its mission: to re-examine critical environmental and development problems around the world and formulate realistic proposals to address them.

A second goal was to strengthen international cooperation on environmental and development issues. And, finally, the commission aimed to raise the level of understanding of and commitment to sustainable development on the part of individuals, organizations, businesses and governments. When the commission was organized, some wanted it to be limited to environmental issues only. However, they believed that environmental quality and sustainable development were two inseparable concepts which must be linked in formulating a global strategy.



With this established, the commission thus defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."



"This commission believes that people can build a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure. Our report is not a prediction of ever increasing environmental decay, poverty and hardship in ever more decreasing resources. We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base...We have the power to reconcile human affairs with the natural laws and to thrive in the process."

For three years they conducted public meetings in diverse regions throughout the world to get a broad perspective of environment and development issues. These hearings proved invaluable and resulted in more than 10,000 pages of testimony. The commission's work concluded in 1987 with the publication of "Our Common Future", (The Brundtland Report), which outlined a path for global sustainable development and served a key role in bringing sustainability into the public eye world-wide.

A conclusion from the WCED report stated: "Attempts to maintain social and ecological stability through old approaches to development and environmental protection will increase instability. Security must be sought through change...We are unanimous in our conviction that the security, well-being, and very survival of the planet depend on such changes, now."

The topic of sustainable development has drawn increasing national and international attention over the last decade. This attention reflects an understanding that the growing scale of the environmental and economic challenges facing us will require fundamentally different approaches to long-term problems. In response to the commission's report and the subsequent charge from the United Nations, governments world-wide began to examine their programs and policies to find ways to promote sustainable development.

UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and 1992 Rio Earth Summit

An additional outcome of the WCED report, was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). A two-year series of preparatory meetings culminated in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, June 1992. This marked the second meeting of world leaders to discuss environmental and development issues and was substantially larger than its predecessor the Stockholm Conference held 20 years earlier.

Agenda 21

The Earth Summit was larger not only in the level of participation by the nations of the world, but also in the scope of issues it sought to address. Over 100 heads of state and government attended the Earth Summit and 170 nations sent delegations. As part of the Earth Summit, national leaders had an opportunity to sign international conventions on climate change and biodiversity, a "Declaration of Environment and Development" and an Agenda for the 21st Century (a.k.a. Agenda 21), which sought to establish a concerted effort to educate people about the state of both environment and development, and to assist them to make decisions that lead to sustainability.



Secretary General of UNCED, Maurice Strong, summarized Agenda 21 as, a "program of action for a sustainable future for the human family and a first step towards ensuring that the world will become a more just, secure and prosperous habitat for all humanity."

Agenda 21 called on all countries of the world to undertake a comprehensive process of planning and action to attain sustainability. In addition to global agenda, this document also detailed a role for cities and counties. Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 (known as Local Agenda 21) states: "Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and ...as the level of government closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development."

President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD)

On the anniversary of the Earth Summit in June 1993, President Clinton signed an executive order establishing the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD). The Council was established to help create U.S. policies that will encourage economic growth, job creation, and environmental protection. In his address to the nation he said, "Every nation faces a challenge to identify and implement policies that will meet the needs of the present without compromising the future. America will meet that challenge with the help of this Council and the ideas and experience that its members bring to this important task."

The 25 member Council built new partnerships among representatives from industry, government (including U.S. Cabinet members) and environmental, labor, and civil rights organizations in order to develop bold new approaches to integrate economic and environmental policies. Their charge: to transform the President's vision of sustainable development into a concrete plan of action. Their initial work concluded in February 1996, with the publishing of their report entitled, "Sustainable America: A New Consensus for Prosperity, Opportunity, and A Healthy Environment for the Future."

In January 1997, the Commission issued its second major report entitled, "Building on Consensus: A Progress Report on Sustainable America."

Climate Change



Global climate change perhaps presents the nations of the world with a potentially unifying sustainability issue as the affects of significant changes in the world's climate would impact us all. In December 1997, more than 150 nations adopted a historic agreement known as the

Kyoto Climate Agreement to protect the earth's atmosphere and climate. This climate agreement was established in Kyoto, Japan. For the first time, nations agreed to place legally binding limits to their emissions of heat trapping greenhouse gases. 38 industrial nations agreed to to reduce their emissions of six greenhouse gases to 5% below the 1990 emission levels by the year 2012. While not a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, President Bush commits the US to an aggressive strategy to cut greenhouse gas intensity by 18% over the next 10 years. The Global Climate Change initiative also supports vital climate change research and ensures that America's Workers and citizens of the developing world are not unfairly penalized.

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

Beginning in April 2001, preparation for the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa took place at the local, national, sub-regional, regional and global levels. Negotiations occurred addressing not only Agenda 21, but also confronting new critical issues the world is facing in this century with globalization. There were four global PrepComs held in preparation for WSSD. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) marked the 10-year anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

WSSD took place from August 26 - September 4, 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa. It presented a timely opportunity for governments, United Nations' agencies, multilateral financial institutions, NGOs, and civil society to reinvigorate their global commitment towards sustainable development. Approximately 60,000 people from all over the world attended the Summit. The Summit resulted in a series of commitments in five priority areas that were backed up by specific government announcements on programs, and by partnership initiatives. The five priority areas included water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity.

U.S. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky identified U.S. objectives for the 2002 World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa.

"The United States intends to work in partnership with governments, the private sector and NGOs to achieve sustainable development initiatives to reduce the number of people living without safe drinking water; enhance access to clean energy, reduce hunger and increase agricultural productivity; ensure universal access to basic education; stem AIDS and reduce TB and malaria; and manage and conserve forests and oceans. "

Since the WSSD, the United States has been actively engaged in the partnerships and initiatives announced in Johannesburg. These include the

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[Water for Poor Signature Initiative](#) [EXIT disclaimer >](#)

[Initiative to Cut Hunger in Africa](#) [EXIT disclaimer >](#)

[Africa Education Partnership](#) [EXIT disclaimer >](#)

[Geographic Information for Sustainable Development](#) [EXIT disclaimer >](#)

[White Water to Blue Water Initiative](#) and [EXIT disclaimer >](#)

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