
WHO: Fridays For Future and other environmental organizations and activists
WHAT: Earth Day online climate protests and pandemic-limited in-person climate protests
WHEN: Earth Day Thursday 22 April 2021
WHERE: In various Zoom and Facebook Live links and in various cities worldwide

Two of the key people behind the original Earth Day 51 years ago were US Sen. Gaylord Nelson (D-WI), who came up with the original idea, and Denis Hayes, the national coordinator he hired to organize the event. As Nelson would posit in a 1987 interview for US PBS-TV, “I don’t think
there is any other issue…as critical to mankind as the issue of the quality of the environment in which we live.”

That Earth Day 1970 was fueled by the contributing confluence of such factors as the Christmas Eve 1968 iconic “Earthrise” photo taken from lunar orbit by Apollo 8 NASA astronaut William A. Anders; the January 1969 Union Oil offshore platform massive spill of more than 11 million liters of oil that killed some 10,000 dolphins, seabirds, sea lions, and seals and despoiled Santa Barbara, California’s beaches; Rachel Carson’s book Silent Spring released September 1962; and the June 1969 catching-on-fire of Cleveland’s Cuyahoga River (yet again). Following a warm-up teach-in held at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in mid-March 1970, inspired by the anti-Vietnam War teach-in there in 1965, Earth Day took place on Wednesday, 22 April, 1970. In cities and towns and at colleges and schools across the US, an estimated 20 million people took part, 10 percent of the USA’s population at that time. In NYC, for instance, Fifth Avenue shut down to cars and trucks for the day, by order of NYC Mayor John V. Lindsay (R). Earth Day 1970 helped bring about the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency in December 1970, and it in part prompted passage (in the US) of the 1970 Clean Air Act, the 1972 Clean Water Act, and the 1973 Endangered Species Act. The first UN environment meeting gathered in June 1972 in Stockholm, Sweden, too.

Earth Day became an annual event, later expanding to Earth Day Week. By 1990, Earth Day took place in 141 countries, and in the 20th anniversary year reached 200 million people. For Earth Day 2000, some 5,000 environmental organizations in 184 countries joined in, to what had grown into the world’s biggest secular observance, with a key focus being the growing global warming crisis.

For the third time, in 2021, local groups of Fridays For Future will be important participants in Earth Day. EarthDay.org is the overall coordinating organization, with the overall theme of “Restore Our Earth,” and with Climate Literacy as one of five main “pillars.” For the second year in a row—including for the 50th anniversary in 2020—because of COVID-19 pandemic safeguards, most events in the 192 participating countries will take place online. But many local Fridays for Future groups will use pandemic-limited numbers of face-masked and socially distanced protesters, creative street theater, banners and signs, and sometimes even hundreds of pairs of shoes in a ShoeStrike set for Earth Day, Thursday 22 April.

Alfred, Mattis, Marta, Ann, Rolf, others in the Calendar Team