From Alarm to Action

How environmental concerns became public action and federal policy

SS24.US2.15a "Trace the events that fostered the emergence of the modern environmental movement and prompted government regulations as well as civic action."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two warnings or damaging events, circle two forms of civic action, and number the three federal actions in the order they occurred. Use your marks to trace how concern became public pressure and policy.

When Pollution Became a National Issue

1 In 1962, marine biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, warning that widespread pesticide use could harm wildlife and human health. Chemical companies disputed her claims, but the book pushed readers to question whether new chemicals were being tested carefully enough. Seven years later, an offshore oil well near Santa Barbara, California, spilled crude oil into the ocean. Images of oil-coated beaches and birds brought distant environmental damage into living rooms. The spill did not begin public concern about pollution; it gave people already worried by scientific warnings a visible example of the risks they wanted officials to address.

2 That June, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio caught fire where oil and industrial waste floated on the water. The river had burned before, but news of this fire became a symbol of polluted waterways. Activists connected such incidents to a larger argument: pollution could travel beyond one town, so local efforts alone were not enough. On April 22, 1970, millions of Americans participated in the first Earth Day. Teach-ins, rallies, and neighborhood cleanups turned private concern into public action. These events did not produce a single demand, but the scale of participation showed elected officials that environmental protection mattered to voters.

3 Federal action took several forms. In December 1970, President Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency to bring federal pollution programs together. Later that month, Congress passed major amendments to the Clean Air Act, expanding the federal role in limiting air pollution. Congress passed the Clean Water Act in 1972, creating a framework for controlling discharges into waterways. Laws and agencies did not end the movement: citizens continued to organize, monitor pollution, and press officials to enforce the rules. This chain from warnings and visible damage to public organizing and federal action shows how civic pressure helped change government responsibilities.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Carson's warning and the Santa Barbara spill reinforce each other as reasons for public concern?

2. Trace how news of the Cuyahoga fire and concerns about pollution helped turn private worry into public action by 1970.

3. Name one federal action from 1970 and the federal action from 1972. What did each do?

4. Why did citizen action continue after federal regulations appeared? Use one action and one goal from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a fictional neighborhood in 1974 where residents notice oily runoff entering a stream. In four or five sentences, trace how they could turn what they see into civic action and a request for enforcement under a law named in the passage.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.15a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two warnings or damaging events, circle two forms of civic action, and number the three federal actions in the order they occurred. Use your marks to trace how concern became public pressure and policy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Carson's warning and the Santa Barbara spill reinforce each other as reasons for public concern?	**Carson warned about possible harm from chemicals, while images of the spill made environmental damage visible to people already concerned by such warnings.**
2	Trace how news of the Cuyahoga fire and concerns about pollution helped turn private worry into public action by 1970.	**The fire became a symbol of polluted waterways. Activists argued that pollution required more than local efforts, and millions joined Earth Day teach-ins, rallies, and cleanups.**
3	Name one federal action from 1970 and the federal action from 1972. What did each do?	**In 1970, the Environmental Protection Agency brought federal pollution programs together, or Clean Air Act amendments expanded federal limits on air pollution. The 1972 Clean Water Act created a framework for controlling discharges into waterways.**
4	Why did citizen action continue after federal regulations appeared? Use one action and one goal from the passage.	**Regulations still needed enforcement. Citizens monitored pollution or organized to press officials to enforce the rules.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Residents notice oily runoff entering their stream and record where it appears. They share their observations at a public meeting and form a group to investigate. Together, they ask officials to determine whether the discharge violates the Clean Water Act and to enforce its rules if it does. Their response turns visible harm into organized pressure for government action.

Accept other accurate links between the events, civic participation, and federal action stated in the passage. For Your Turn, accept a plausible sequence that includes evidence, collective action, and a conditional request to enforce a relevant law.