



Environmental protection – history

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What is environment?

10 “Environment” includes:

- natural resources both abiotic and biotic, such as air, water, soil, fauna and flora and the interaction between the same factors;
- property which forms part of the cultural heritage; and
- the characteristic aspects of the landscape.

(Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Resulting from Activities Dangerous to the Environment, Lugano, 21.VI.1993)

History, dating back to early times – several local initiatives in the XV-XVI Century, but there are many earlier examples, disperse and diverse (examples?)

Chief Seattle's 1854 oration:

- “This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. ...
- Your destiny is a mystery to us. What will happen when the buffalo are all slaughtered? The wild horses tamed? What will happen when the secret corners of the forest are heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills is blotted with talking wires? Where will the thicket be? Gone! Where will the eagle be? Gone! And what is to say goodbye to the swift pony and then hunt? The end of living and the beginning of survival. ...
- We love this earth as a newborn loves its mother's heartbeat. So, if we sell you our land, love it as we have loved it. Care for it, as we have cared for it. Hold in your mind the memory of the land as it is when you receive it. Preserve the land for all children, and love it, as God loves us.”



The 1948 Donora smog

It was a historic air inversion resulting in a wall of smog that killed 20 people and sickened 7,000 more in Donora, Pennsylvania, a mill town on the Monongahela River, 24 miles (39 km) southeast of Pittsburgh. Hydrogen fluoride and sulfur dioxide emissions from U.S. Steel's Donora Zinc Works and its American Steel & Wire plant were frequent occurrences in Donora. What made the 1948 event more severe was a temperature inversion, a situation in which warmer air aloft traps pollution in a layer of colder air near the surface. The pollutants in the air mixed with fog to form a thick, yellowish, acid smog that hung over Donora for five days.



London smog 1952

The **Great Smog of '52** or **Big Smoke** was a severe air-pollution event that affected London during December 1952. A period of cold weather, combined with an anticyclone and windless conditions, collected airborne pollutants mostly from the use of coal to form a thick layer of smog over the city. It lasted from Friday 5 to Tuesday 9 December 1952, and then dispersed quickly after a change of weather. Government medical reports in the following weeks estimated that up until 8 December 4,000 people had died prematurely and 100,000 more were made ill because of the smog's effects on the human respiratory tract. More recent research suggests that the total number of fatalities was considerably greater, at about 12,000.



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Peking the present days:



The Club of Rome

The Club of Rome was founded in 1968 as an informal association of independent leading personalities from politics. The Club of Rome members share a common concern for the future of humanity and the planet.

The aims of the Club of Rome are:

- to identify the most crucial problems which will determine the future of humanity;
- to evaluate alternative scenarios for the future;
- to develop and propose practical solutions to the challenges identified;
- to communicate the new insights and knowledge and to stimulate public debate.

It raised considerable public attention in 1972 with its report [The Limits to Growth](#). (Daniella and Denis Meadows and MIT)

Balaton Group

Donella and Dennis Meadows – authors of [The Limits to Growth](#) – founded the Balaton Group in 1982. The proven mix of systems thinking, mutual professional support, and informal creative exchange continues to generate positive solutions through collaboration.

The Balaton Group is named for Lake Balaton in Hungary, where meetings have been held for most of the past 30 years. Its official name is the International Network of Resource Information Centers. We are an international network of researchers and practitioners in fields related to systems and sustainability.

The Balaton Group accelerates and deepens the world's general understanding of three factors that are fundamental to sustainable development:

- a systems orientation,
- a long-term perspective, and
- an unshakeable personal commitment to achieving positive change.

The major characteristics of human impact on the environment in the past decades (after WW II)

- Human impact covers each and every part of natural and man-made environment
- The human impact also means that the negative consequences spread over the different environmental media
- There are no geographical limits, it is a global problem
- ‘Chemical time bomb’ effect: long lasting effects.
- Unpredictable effects, hard to foresee the consequences.
- More and more disasters, catastrophes or dangers, caused by human negligence and fault (Chernobil).
- The potential consequences are always bigger (red-mud in Hungary, 2010, Mexican Gulf 2010)
- The erosion of human values and morals (consumerism, etc.)
- And many others

Examples – Mexican Gulf



Phases of the development of international environmental law

- From to beginning to the UN (1945) E.g.: Paris Convention 1902. whaling convention 1937, Trail Smelter arbitration (1940) - 'sic utere tuo'
- From UN to UN Stockholm conference (1945-1972)
- From Stockholm to Rio (1972-1992)
- Since Rio (1992-), two other major steps: 2002 Johannesburg, 2012 Rio II
- UN SDGs 2015

UN SDGs (2015)

