



UAW Family,

Today is Earth Day, a day that highlights important environmental issues and encourages us to take action to protect our planet. It is also a significant day for the labor movement. The environment affects our working conditions, and our industries affect the communities in which we live.



The History of Earth Day

Earth Day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970. The idea was the result of many different people and organizations working together, including its founder U.S. Senator Gaylord and its first national coordinator, activist Denis Hayes.

Earth Day's founders were influenced by massive environmental catastrophes caused by corporate greed. The first was the Santa Barbara Oil Spill of 1969, where a pipeline leaked 100,000 barrels of crude oil off the shore of California. The second was the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire in Cleveland, Ohio; oil buildup in the river accumulated for years and was ignited by a passing train.

Earth Day's UAW Roots

However, it wasn't just political figures and environmental activists who supported Earth Day. The UAW was the first Earth Day's largest donor. Walter Reuther enthusiastically donated \$2,000 to jumpstart these efforts, printed leaflets, and utilized the Organizing Department to spread the word in cities and states across America.

Olga Madar, the first head of the UAW Conservation and Resource Development Department, made the important point that union members are "first and foremost American citizens and consumers" who "breathe the same air and drink and bathe in the same water" as their neighbors in other occupations.

Walter Reuther importantly asked "What good is a dollar an hour more in wages if your neighborhood is burning down? What good is another week's vacation if the lake you used to go to is polluted and you can't swim in it and the kids can't play in it?"

Past UAW leaders understood that our working conditions and the health of our planet are both critical and deeply connected.

The UAW's Position on the Environment Today

Earth Day helped pass environmental laws that protect workers and our communities, including the Clean Air, Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA helped phase out leaded gasoline, to name just one important example connected to the automotive industry.

We live on one blue rock in the vast nothingness of space. Do we want to nurture and care for our planet, or do we want to treat it as a disposable commodity and waste what we have? With climate change threatening our way of life, this is a question that we have to honestly answer, both as members of our communities and as workers affected by chemicals used in the industries in which we work.

What can we do to support Earth Day?

Earth Day is about each of us doing our part to protect the environment. Be a champion for environmental awareness. As union members, we must bring this perspective with us to our workplaces when addressing health and safety concerns, to union meetings, and to the political arena.

For more information, visit EARTHDAY.ORG

As always, In Solidarity!

