

# Earth Day: Conservation ideas evolve across Oklahoma Earth Day anniversary offers chance to look, reflect

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Lyntha Wesner's parents had their children during World War II. They were very focused on being good stewards of their resources. Wesner witnessed these actions and "it took."



Maggie Jackson, of Enid, looks at art made from recycled items Wednesday at the Rethink, Recycle, Redesign exhibit at the Festival of the Arts in downtown Oklahoma City. Photo by Jim Beckel, The Oklahoman

This is the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, the day celebrated annually to generate appreciation for the environment and inspire awareness of environmental issues.

The first Earth Day in 1970 enlisted 20 million Americans, according to the Earth Day Network.

In 1990, Earth Day Network expanded internationally and organized campaigns in 142 nations. Earth Day now boasts the participation of more than 1 billion people in 190 countries.

## At home

For Wesner, who lives in [Norman](#), conservation is not about just one day, but rather about daily life. She takes pride in the strides taken around her to be a good steward of resources.

Curbside recycling is one of many ways this is being done in Norman. In 2007 the issue was put to a vote in Norman and passed with more than 70 percent of voters saying yes to adding \$3 to monthly water bills to pay for curbside recycling. Lower-income residents pay \$2.40.

"A lot of people look at the impact on the environment," said Wesner, a member of Citizens Organized to Recycle Our Environment, "and it does tend to be one thing you can actually do at home and have an impact."

## At work and in education

The Re-Invent Your Print recycling program is set to begin at the state Capitol today, said [Randy Ross](#), deputy director of the [Department of Central Services](#) at the Capitol.

The program will expand current paper recycling services to include aluminum, some plastics, and cardboard. Before the new program, the only item recycled at the Capitol was office paper. Paper recycling has now been expanded to include newspaper, magazines and cardstock.

This is possible because the Department of Central Services, Property Reutilization Division, now has the capability to pick up, sort and bale the recyclables, which will either be delivered to recycling centers or sold as spot buys from their facility, depending on market conditions. Previously, allowable materials were limited by vendor capabilities.

With the new program in place, all employees and visitors will be challenged to "Re-Invent Your Prints" by rethinking daily behaviors and conserving resources.

Ross said the Capitol has an average of 10,000 visitors per month, attending many events that generate considerable waste.

"Recycling receptacles will be set up throughout the Capitol to ensure visitors, as well as Capitol employees, have adequate opportunity to properly dispose of items such as beverage containers, newspapers and cardboard boxes," he said.

"By leading by example we hope to raise awareness and have people "think" where to dispose of their waste which may carry over to their personal lives when they leave the Capitol."

At the [University of Central Oklahoma](#), the Earth Day Fair was held Wednesday on campus. Student organizations and local and state environmental groups provided information on how students can get involved in caring for the environment. The UCO Earth Day Fair began in 1985 when the Biology Club set up a table and sold Earth Day T-shirts and plants to raise money for environmental groups.

"There are environmental problems that threaten human existence that are going to take time to fix," said UCO biology professor David Bass, the school's Earth Day Committee chairman. "That's not something that is going to happen in the next generation, but over time if we continue to abuse resources, to live excessive lifestyles where we are doing harm to the environment, at some point, it's not going to support life as we know it."

Bass said individuals should take advantage of recycling, turning down thermostats in the winter and drive less and walk more.

"In our homes, look for energy-saving devices," Bass said. "It's small changes. As individuals, we don't make a big difference, but if we work together and we all are doing a little bit, that could be a huge savings."

## Through the state

The Superfund cleanup at Tar Creek continues to be a top environmental issue for the state because contamination at the site is so widespread with impacts on both human health and the environment, said [Judy Duncan](#), spokeswoman for the state Department of [Environmental Quality](#).

"We are nearing the end of the phase of moving people out of the area and cleanup and removal of chat piles has begun, but the site will continue to be a major environmental issue for some time to come," she said.

But there are other issues. [Oklahoma](#) is facing pending nonattainment with air quality standards in our metro areas, Duncan said. Oklahoma's air quality has actually improved over the years but increasingly stringent standards for air quality are being adopted by the federal government and current air monitoring indicates that we will not be able to remain in attainment with these new standards.

Also, funding for public water and wastewater infrastructure continues to be a problem, she said.

"Like most states, water and sewer lines as well as treatment facilities are aging," Duncan said. "In some cases, communities have not been able to keep up with the demands of growth. Federal stimulus funding was helpful but the needs are so much greater than funding capacity that this remains an issue"

Duncan said Oklahoma has made strides in terms of being more environmentally conscious. She said that at the time of the first Earth Day automobiles had no controls for air pollution and many Oklahoma communities had little or no treatment of sewage prior to discharge to our rivers and streams. And in most cases, litter is no longer dropped and left for the wind or someone else to remove.

"This is one example of where society's consciousness of acceptable behavior has radically changed," Duncan said.

The Department of Environmental Quality operates a 24 hour complaint hot line and 10 years ago it received almost 7,000 complaints annually. Most of those complaints dealt with failure of individual sewage treatment systems or improper disposal of solid waste.

Over the past four years, they have averaged less than 4,000 complaints and action to correct problems has resulted in an average reduction of 25 million gallons of sewage discharge and proper disposal of 40,000 cubic yards of solid waste each year

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