



Virginia Environmental Law

Happy Earth Day in Virginia

By: Ann Neil Cosby. *This was posted Thursday, April 22nd, 2010*

Forty years ago today, [Earth Day](#) was born. Its conception marked the [beginning of the modern environmental movement](#) in the United States, and according to its founder, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson, was the day “the environmental issue came of age in American political life.”

What many might not know, however, is that the environmental movement in Virginia began long before April 22, 1970. Almost a quarter century before mainstream environmentalism hit the streets, Virginia adopted the [State Water Control Law](#), one of the first comprehensive statewide efforts to control water pollution in the country. Becoming effective on July 1, 1946, the law established the State Water Control Board, which was tasked with a mission to “protect existing water quality, to reduce and prevent water pollution, and to restore and maintain state water to a quality that w[ill] protect human health and aquatic life.”

In 1966, Virginia adopted the Air Pollution Control Law and established the Air Pollution Control Board. The Council on the Environment (a precursor to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality) was established in 1970, and the regulation of solid waste by the Virginia Board of Health began in 1971.

On July 1, 1971, Article 11 of the Virginia Constitution became effective, making it the policy of the Commonwealth to “conserve, develop, and utilize its natural resources, its public lands, and its historical sites and buildings and protect its atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution impairment or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth.” Virginia was one of the first states to include the protection of natural resources in its constitution.

Since then, Virginia has taken great strides in trying to [clean up the Chesapeake Bay](#) and its watersheds, to reduce air pollution, and to protect our natural resources. There may still be much work to do, and with new federal mandates for both water and air quality having recently been implemented by EPA, some might think it will be hard for Virginia to keep up. But, fear not, here in the Old Dominion, we have always led the way.

Happy Earth Day!

(Hat tip to the [Virginia Department of Environmental Quality](#) for their informative Web site.)

<http://vaenvironmentallaw.com>

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