

# Earth Week reminds us to fight for environmental justice

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Today begins Earth Week, traditionally celebrated in Eugene with a fair on the banks of the Willamette River. Certainly, there is joy to be had in honoring the beauty of the Earth. At the same time, we can't ignore the scientific reality that the Earth's health is the same as community health. This year's Earth Week celebration will offer a twist on the usual flower plantings and electric car demonstrations through a focus on community health and environmental justice.

We invite our collective community to join us in Earth Week 2018: An Environmental Justice Perspective.

The first Earth Day celebration in 1970 represented a turning point for environmental awareness and advocacy. That special day followed the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act on Jan. 1, 1970, under the Nixon administration. National leaders were deeply influenced by the heightened public concern about environmental pollution spurred by Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring." Their first steps toward environmental advocacy included the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act.

During the 1980s, communities of color came together to fight for their right not to be routinely targeted with environmental pollution and destruction. African American, Native American and Latino people began to challenge how institutional racism forced their communities to endure hazardous waste dumps, chemical factories, coal-fired power plants and pesticide-laden work sites.

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The environmental justice movement exposed the truth: Those who live and work in our country's most polluted environments are overwhelmingly low-income families and people of color.

Oregon is not immune to these unjust patterns. Think of the polluting chemical weapons incinerator built on tribal lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla along the Columbia River, or the way Oregon's large agricultural businesses expect to spray highly toxic pesticides right up to the doors of farm worker cabins with impunity.

By the 1990s, the environmental justice movement was on track to gather allies and influence the way our country understands how racism intersects with environmental policy and social values. In 2000, Beyond Toxics was founded to carry on this work in Oregon, to advocate and

support communities whose health and well-being are robbed from them by patterns of environmental racism. During our years of community organizing, Beyond Toxics sees environmental protection and environmental justice as the same goal.

Advocating for environmental justice means we demand that government policies and business practices use a framework of justice and equity to protect all Oregonians from environmental harm. Whether farm workers or tribal youth, communities living on the front lines of impacted landscapes deserve a clean environment and equal and meaningful involvement in decisions about environmental health.

Let's make this change together! We invite all of our collective community to participate in Earth Week 2018: An Environmental Justice Perspective. Beyond Toxics joins with our allies NAACP, Our Children's Trust, CALC, Friends of Trees, and many others to bring you a week of exciting, politically relevant, and educational events.

There is something for everyone and every age, from Monday's movie about the Dakota Access Pipeline, to Wednesday's panel on Climate Justice, to Friday's A Breath of Fresh Air concert in Kesey Square, to Saturday's work party in Huerto de la Familia's pollinator garden, to the culminating community potluck at NAACP headquarters on Earth Day itself. See the full list of events at [www.BeyondToxics.org](http://www.BeyondToxics.org).

We share one Earth. This is our common ground. As we celebrate Earth Day this year and around the world, let's show our respect for the Earth and not forget about many of the vulnerable communities who are forced to bear the disproportionate burden of environmental hazards.

We can strive to be inclusive at every level of decision-making and uplift the rights of communities to address environmental injustices that degrade the Earth and harm our people's health.

On April 22, let's commit to a conscious, collective responsibility to the Earth and the people who depend on it.

Mysti Frost, Ana Molina and Krystal Abrams are environmental justice organizers for Beyond Toxics in Eugene.

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