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Ann Arbor Prepares for Earth Day '80

Earth Day - April 22, 1970 - was a watershed event for the cause of environmental protection in the United States. All across the country, citizens expressed support for cleaning up the environment by holding teach-ins, rallies and marches. Nearly 20 million people were involved. A new national commitment was born that day - a commitment to clean up air and water, provide safe and healthful workplaces, rejuvenate cities and protect natural areas from uncontrolled development.

The original Earth Day constituency was extremely broad-based, and couldn't easily be pigeonholed according to labels like "liberal" or "conservative." People from all walks of life participated, and the movement was thus able to garner the necessary political support for its environmental goals. The National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act can all be regarded as outgrowths of the environmental movement which began on Earth Day. The same can be said for the Michigan Environmental Protection Act in this state.

A large number of state and national environmental groups also had their beginnings in the era's new ecological consciousness. One such group was U-M ENACT (Environmental Action for Survival), which was born in late 1969 and held a four day teach-in on the environment in March of 1970. Later that year, ENACT went on to set up the Ecology Center, which soon developed into a non-profit organization entirely separate from the University. Throughout the 1970's, the Ecology Center and similar groups have endeavored to keep concern for the environment alive among public policy makers and the citizenry through both education and direct political action.

The tenth anniversary of Earth Day couldn't have come at a better time. Although we have made headway, recent events have shown that the progress of a decade can be eliminated in an instant unless we maintain constant vigilance. Environmentalists have constantly fought the erroneous assumption, spawned by many business and political leaders, that environmental protection conflicts with economic and energy production goals. With economic and energy crises mounting as we enter the 1980's, the attacks on the environment have escalated.

To expedite the siting of priority energy projects, the proposed Energy Mobilization Board may be given the authority to undercut provisions of a number of hard-won laws designed to protect public health and the environment. Large scale development of synthetic fuels threaten the air, land and water in vast areas of the west. Government and business continue to argue that compliance with environmental standards adds unreasonably to the costs of production and thus to the nation's inflation rate.

And while significant environmental progress was made during the 1970's (with Michigan taking the lead on issues such as beverage container deposits, household laundry detergent phosphorus levels and wetlands protection), a whole new set of complex problems has recently come to light. Widespread use of toxic substances and improper disposal of hazardous wastes have emerged as particularly threatening to the environ-