

7 Enviro Predictions From Earth Day 1970 That Were Just Dead Wrong

Andrew Follett, Daily Caller, 4-22-16

Environmentalists truly believed and predicted during the first Earth Day in 1970 that the planet was doomed unless drastic actions were taken.

Humanity never quite got around to that drastic action, but environmentalists still recall the first Earth Day fondly and hold many of the predictions in high regard.

So this Earth Day, The Daily Caller News Foundation takes a look at predictions made by environmentalists around the original Earth Day in 1970 to see how they've held up.

Have any of these dire predictions come true? No, but that hasn't stopped environmentalists from worrying.

From predicting the end of civilization to classic worries about peak oil, here are seven environmentalist predictions that were just flat out wrong.

1: "Civilization Will End Within 15 Or 30 Years"

Harvard biologist Dr. George Wald warned shortly before the first Earth Day in 1970 that civilization would soon end "unless immediate action is taken against problems facing mankind." Three years before his projection, Wald was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine.

Wald was a vocal opponent of the Vietnam War and the nuclear arms race. He even flew to Moscow at one point to advise the leader of the Soviet Union on environmental policy.

Despite his assistance to a communist government, civilization still exists. The percentage of Americans who are concerned about environmental threats has fallen as civilization failed to end by environmental catastrophe.

2: "100-200 Million People Per Year Will Be Starving To Death During The Next Ten Years"

Stanford professor Dr. Paul Ehrlich declared in April 1970 that mass starvation was imminent. His dire predictions failed to materialize as the number of people living in poverty has significantly declined and the amount of food per person has steadily increased, despite population growth. The world's Gross Domestic Product per person has immeasurably grown despite increases in population.

Ehrlich is largely responsible for this view, having co-published "The Population Bomb" with The Sierra Club in 1968. The book made a number of claims including that millions of humans would starve to death in the 1970s and 1980s, mass famines would sweep England leading to the country's demise, and that ecological destruction would devastate the planet causing the collapse of civilization.

3: "Population Will Inevitably And Completely Outstrip Whatever Small Increases In Food Supplies We Make"

Paul Ehrlich also made the above claim in 1970, shortly before an agricultural revolution that caused the world's food supply to rapidly increase.

Ehrlich has consistently failed to revise his predictions when confronted with the fact that they did not occur, stating in 2009 that “perhaps the most serious flaw in The Bomb was that it was much too optimistic about the future.”

4: “Demographers Agree Almost Unanimously … Thirty Years From Now, The Entire World … Will Be In Famine”

Environmentalists in 1970 truly believed in a scientific consensus predicting global famine due to population growth in the developing world, especially in India.

“Demographers agree almost unanimously on the following grim timetable: by 1975 widespread famines will begin in India; these will spread by 1990 to include all of India, Pakistan, China and the Near East, Africa. By the year 2000, or conceivably sooner, South and Central America will exist under famine conditions,” Peter Gunter, a professor at North Texas State University, said in a 1970 issue of *The Living Wilderness*. “By the year 2000, thirty years from now, the entire world, with the exception of Western Europe, North America, and Australia, will be in famine.”

India, where the famines were supposed to begin, recently became one of the world’s largest exporters of agricultural products and food supply per person in the country has drastically increased in recent years. In fact, the number of people in every country listed by Gunter has risen dramatically since 1970.

5: “In A Decade, Urban Dwellers Will Have To Wear Gas Masks To Survive Air Pollution”

Life magazine stated in January 1970 that scientist had “solid experimental and theoretical evidence” to believe that “in a decade, urban dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution…by 1985 air pollution will have reduced the amount of sunlight reaching Earth by one half.”

Despite the prediction, air quality has been improving worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Air pollution has also sharply declined in industrialized countries. Carbon dioxide (CO₂), the gas environmentalists are worried about today, is odorless, invisible and harmless to humans in normal amounts.

6: “Childbearing [Will Be] A Punishable Crime Against Society, Unless The Parents Hold A Government License”

David Brower, the first executive director of The Sierra Club made the above claim and went on to say that “[a]ll potential parents [should be] required to use contraceptive chemicals, the government issuing antidotes to citizens chosen for childbearing.” Brower was also essential in founding Friends of the Earth and the League Of Conservation Voters and much of the modern environmental movement.

Brower believed that most environmental problems were ultimately attributable to new technology that allowed humans to pass natural limits on population size. He famously stated before his death in 2000 that “all technology should be assumed guilty until proven innocent” and repeatedly advocated for mandatory birth control.

Today, the only major government to ever get close to his vision has been China, which ended its one-child policy last October.

7: “By The Year 2000 … There Won’t Be Any More Crude Oil”

On Earth Day in 1970 ecologist Kenneth Watt famously predicted that the world would run out of oil saying, “You’ll drive up to the pump and say, ‘Fill ‘er up, buddy,’ and he’ll say, ‘I am very sorry, there isn’t any.’”

Numerous academics like Watt predicted that American oil production peaked in 1970 and would gradually decline, likely causing a global economic meltdown. However, the successful application of massive hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, caused American oil production to come roaring back and there is currently too much oil on the market.

American oil and natural gas reserves are at their highest levels since 1972 and American oil production in 2014 was 80 percent higher than in 2008 thanks to fracking.

Furthermore, the U.S. now controls the world’s largest untapped oil reserve, the Green River Formation in Colorado. This formation alone contains up to 3 trillion barrels of untapped oil shale, half of which may be recoverable. That’s five and a half times the proven reserves of Saudi Arabia. This single geologic formation could contain more oil than the rest of the world’s proven reserves combined.