

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Earth Week: Future looks bleak

This is Earth Week, and our planet has never been in worse shape since the beginning of human civilization.

The observance of Earth Week dates to 1969, when Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin called for a national environmental teach-in. The next year, students from the University of Pennsylvania took him up on



Commentary by
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the idea and launched Earth Week. More than 20,000 people — mostly young people — gathered at the mall across from Independence Hall on April 21, 1970, to call for specific actions to protect Planet Earth.

Those young people are now senior citizens, and while there's been a great deal of progress cleaning up our air and water — President Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency in December 1970 — we are turning a blind eye to the greatest environmental crisis in human history: Climate change.

We need to cut greenhouse emissions in half by the end of this decade, but emissions are still going up, not down.

Earlier this month, Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court blocked Gov. Tom Wolf's attempt to adopt a carbon pricing policy.

The proposed regulation would require the state's numerous fossil fuel-powered electric generating plants to pay a price for every ton of carbon dioxide they emit starting July 1.

The money collected would be used to encourage clean energy and energy conservation programs.

Gov. Wolf has appealed the court order, but it will likely take months to play out.

Soon the U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments in a dispute that could restrict or even eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to control the kinds of pollution that are heating the planet. There is a good chance the conservative court will cripple the government's efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

Meanwhile, the American West is experiencing the driest 20-year period in 1,200 years, devastating farmers and fueling wildfires.

Elsewhere, storms, floods, and other weather extremes have displaced millions of people across Asia and Africa. Tens of millions are expected to go hungry this year because of climate-induced drought, acerbated by the war in Ukraine.

But none of this has hit home in Pottstown.

In January 2018, Pottstown Borough Council and the Pottstown School District passed a joint sustainability plan.

The 128-page document (which can be downloaded from the borough website) contains 39 specific actions grouped in seven categories:

1. Energy — Sustainable Building
2. Mobility
3. Green Infrastructure
4. Health and Nutrition
5. Education and Outreach
6. Local Economy
7. Environmental Stewardship

Have any of the numerous items on the plan's to-do list been implemented? A few, such as bike lanes to create a more bike-friendly Pottstown, and the installation of LED street lights, an on-going project.

But others, such as increasing Pottstown's tree canopy and improving storm water management by removing excess impervious surfaces, have not.

Here in Pottstown, as elsewhere, we need a culture change before we can fight climate change.

