

One more chance for humanity to win

Instructors offer solutions, say improvement must start with individuals



To Royce Ballinger, the condition of the environment is like a baseball game between nature and humanity.

It's the top of the ninth and nature bats last.

Ballinger, director of the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said the time span of the human population can be divided into stages -- innings.

"If you look at the end of the game as a chance for humanity to win," he said, "we clearly have one more out to go."

For the human race to win, people must get their priorities straight and start taking care of the environment, he said. If action isn't taken soon, the game will be over and humanity will lose.

"We are not very good as humans at seeing the chronic effects of things," Ballinger told about 40 students in the Nebraska Union on Thursday. "We are not taught to look down the road 20 years."

"Yes, there is some hope. But there are plenty of things that need to be done."

Ballinger spoke in conjunction with Earth Day, which was Sunday. The event was established in 1970 to create awareness of environmental issues and encourage the passage of clear air and water acts.

Ballinger has been involved with the movement from its humble beginnings.

Twenty years ago, Ballinger was a student at Texas A&M. At that time, Earth Day was not news, he said.

"The activity was entirely concentrated on campuses," Ballinger recalled.

Corporations side-stepped the issue of the deteriorating atmosphere. Citizens ignored the problems. Only environmentalists cared about the country's health.

"There wasn't a politician that would touch environmental issues with a 10-foot pole," Ballinger said.

For Earth Day in 1970, Ballinger studied the environment of a local county. He surveyed the air quality, water quality and the amount of trash accumulation.

His interest in the environment earned him the label of "just another protester," he said.

He was thrown into a category composed mostly of Vietnam demonstrators. He wasn't recognized nationally for his efforts. Not many were in 1970.

But Ballinger said he did make a difference.

"We established the tradition of concern," Ballinger said.

That tradition has grown. Since the first Earth Day, the U.S. government has enacted more than 48 pieces of legislation related to the environment, he said.

Today, environment, ecology and pollution are household words, Ballinger said. Many people recycle. Most at least are aware.

"Now, 20 years later, environmental issues are like motherhood and apple pie," Ballinger said.

But Ballinger and other local environmentalists recognize that more must be done.

Richard Sutton, a registered landscape architect and associate professor at UNL, said he is hearing the same rhetoric he heard 20 years ago, but has seen little improvement.

"There are still too many people saying it's not a big deal," Sutton said. "But it is. I don't know, maybe people are living in a completely sealed environment where they don't see anything."



Sutton

Sutton said the population is rising. The amount of waste is increasing. Trees are being cut down. The environment is decaying.

One American causes as much pollution as 20 people in Third World countries, he said.

According to Ballinger, the population of the world grows at a rate of 10,270 people per hour.

Eighty percent of the world's people have gross incomes of less than \$700 a year, he said.

Twenty percent of the people in the developed countries use 80 percent of the world's resources, Ballinger said.

If changes are going to be made in the environment, Ballinger and Sutton said, solutions must be started locally.

"People in Lincoln need to bite the bullet and start recycling," Sutton said. "We need to think about Earth Day every day."

Sutton, who calls himself a radical environmentalist, has made personal contributions to the event since it began in 1970.

At that time, he was a student at Colorado State University. He partici-



Ballinger

pated in a ceremonial funeral for the combustion engine. He was involved with displays. He strengthened the cause by spreading information.

Since then Sutton has remained involved in Earth Day. In 1980, he organized a photo exhibition on East Campus.

"It was the only activity that had to do with Earth Day on this campus," he said.

This year, he manned a booth at Pioneers Park providing people with information about energy conservation and wildlife. He participated in cleaning up

the park and distributing trees.

Sutton remained active in the cause because of his relationship to the environment. As a landscape architect, he said, it's important to have an understanding of the relationship between nature and man.

Maybe if everyone had this understanding, he said, things would improve.

Improvement could begin with a ban on all non-recyclable products, Sutton said. All packaging that is not recyclable should have a user's fee.

In Lincoln, he said, trees must be planted. Open spaces must be preserved, not developed. Most importantly, people must be aware.

"People have to come to grips with where they are," Sutton said. "People need to ask themselves if in the future there will be the resources to keep operating."

Improving the future means more than Earth Day, according to Richard Boohar, associate professor of biological sciences.

Boohar said the event has been beneficial because it "put a strain on the White House," but he was not directly involved in it this year.

"Good people are getting the word out to others," he said. "But I have other things to do than wave a banner and shriek."

Boohar, who has taught at UNL for 23 years, said he will recognize Earth Day by doing what he does every day. That's recycling, cutting down on energy consumption and driving as little as possible.

"That's much more fun than waving a sign on Earth Day," he said.

College students, he said, should follow his example.

According to Boohar, college students waste "right and left." They don't recycle their aluminum cans or paper. They leave lights on after leaving a room. They buy products, such as compact discs, in over-packaged and non-biodegradable containers.

"All college students have to do is start saying there are some things we won't buy," Boohar said. "And the things we will buy we want packaged in materials that can be recycled."

It's important for people to establish good environmental habits when they're young, he said, so they continue them all their lives.

Gerry Saunders, a biology teacher at Southeast High School, tries to help his students establish those habits.

Saunders, who is working on his Ph.D. in science education at UNL, said he focuses his lessons in April on environmental issues.

This year, Saunders organized a week of activities for Southeast students to remind them that they "can make the future happen or let it happen."

Saunders has been working to make the future happen since his childhood, he said. He learned his good habits from his parents.

Those habits include riding his bike more than driving a car, eating lower on the food chain, recycling and promoting the cause.

In 1970, when Saunders was in college, his professors incorporated Earth Day into their lesson plans. Other than that, he said, there was little publicity.

"It's a lot more of a national effort this year," Saunders said.

The movement now is focused on the individual, he said, which is where it needs to be for change to occur.

"Individuals create the problems," Saunders said. "So individuals must cure the problems."

—Mindy Mozer