Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report

Thanks for making it all possible
To be an environmentalist, you’ve got to wrestle with a conundrum: We need bold action on a short timeline ... with broad public support.

We need to do a lot, quickly, to preserve a livable planet. But progress has to earn and sustain the support of the people in order to last—so progress doesn’t often come in one big swooping action. It usually comes one small-ish victory at a time.

At Environment Texas, we acknowledge the conundrum—and we embrace it. We believe in bold action on a large scale. But we work every day at the local, state and national levels to build, step by step, the support this action demands. Each college, or city or state that deploys more renewable energy helps win more people over to the possibility of a world that runs on the sun and the wind. Each company or state that phases out a single-use plastic product shows more people a way to end harm to ocean wildlife from plastic pollution.

These victories are smaller than the challenges demand. But as their pace picks up, their summary effect grows. A year ago, California became the second state to commit to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity. Now, there are six states with such commitments, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. Back in 2016, California banned single-use plastic bags. In 2019, five more states banned plastic bags, and Maine, Maryland and Vermont banned plastic foam take-out containers. Like all social changes, environmental solutions have tipping points.

Our natural world faces serious problems, and we’ve got to solve them. Our strategy is to make sure that each victory opens a door to the next. Thanks for being with us on the journey.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
Executive Director, Environment Texas
Clean Water & Air

Through our Clean Water & Air program, our staff and members tackled problems ranging from the Trump administration’s attempts to roll back clean water standards, to industrial discharges that violate the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. Below, you’ll find reports on our Get the Lead Out campaign and industrial mishaps that pollute Texas air.

The grades are in: Report finds states are failing to ensure safe drinking water for our children

MARCH 21, 2019: Lead contaminates the water coming out of drinking fountains and taps at schools across the country, and at least 22 states aren’t doing enough about it.

“Get the Lead Out,” a study published March 21 by our research partners Environment America Research & Policy Center and U.S. PIRG Education Fund, examined the policies of 31 states and Washington, D.C., and assigned grades based on how well they protect children from lead in drinking water at school. Twenty-two states earned an F grade, including Texas, with only Illinois and D.C. grading above the C range.

“Waiting for more tests to confirm that our children are drinking water laced with lead is unconscionable,” said John Rumpler, senior director of our national network’s clean water campaign. “It’s time to get the lead out.”

Environment Texas and our national network are working in Texas and more than a dozen other states to protect drinking water for millions of children by advancing policies to proactively get the lead out.

Report finds industrial mishaps spewed 63 million pounds of illegal pollution into Texas’s air

JAN. 31, 2019: Texas industrial facilities in 2017 released more than 63 million pounds of air pollution without authorization.

That’s a 27 percent increase from the previous year, according to “Major Malfunction: Air Pollution from Industrial Malfunctions and Maintenance in Texas in 2017,” a report released by partner group Environment Texas Research & Policy Center on Jan. 30. The report found that while the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) could issue fines as high as $2.3 billion for 2017 violations, the agency fined violators only $1.2 million.

“The data show that polluters routinely violate the law, but TCEQ too often lets them off the hook,” said Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger. “We need to crack down on illegal pollution and make our air safe to breathe.”

Environment Texas is calling on the Legislature to close a loophole known as “affirmative defense” that polluters have used to escape penalties.
Below: Environment Texas presented Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner with the Shining Cities award (left). Environment Texas Research & Policy Center Emma Pabst spoke at a press event recognizing the city for becoming the No. 1 city in Texas for solar energy capacity and 7th highest in the nation (right).
Clean, Green & Renewable Energy

With support from Environment Texas’ members, our national network promoted energy efficiency in our homes, educated city leaders about solar, and fostered the development of wind power. Here are updates on our network’s 100% Renewable Energy and Go Solar campaigns.

**Six states are now committed to 100% clean energy**

**JULY 1, 2019:** In 2018, only one state had committed to 100 percent clean energy. Six months ago, there were two. Now there are six.

In June, Maine and New York became the latest states to pass laws committing to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity, joining Hawaii (2015), California (2018), New Mexico (March) and Washington state (May). Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., have made similar commitments.

“Within less than a year, four states have said, ‘If California can do it, so can we,’” said Rob Sargent, director of our national network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign. “We’re urging decision-makers across the country to join the 100 percent renewable movement and put the United States back on the world map as a climate leader.”

Our network helped win the laws in California, New Mexico, Washington and Maine. We’re also advocating for 100 percent renewable energy laws in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota.

**Austin students get tutored in solar energy**

**DEC. 17, 2018:** On a recent Saturday at Austin High School, class was held on the roof.

On Dec. 15, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center hosted a solar school tour event at Austin High for students of all ages to learn about solar energy. Event attendees toured the school’s rooftop solar installation of more than 200 solar panels, asked Performance Contracting Inc.’s commercial solar developer about solar energy potential, and even baked cookies in solar ovens.

“Over the last decade, Austin Independent School District (AISD) has taken the lead in solar,” said Environment Texas Research & Policy Center Associate Emma Pabst told ABC’s KVUE. “Austin High School is one of the largest solar installations the district has, and every year it helps the district save thousands of dollars in energy costs.”

Currently, AISD has solar panels in eight different schools and 35 other schools have outdoor solar classrooms.

---

Photo credits: (left top) ilfede via Bigstock; (left bottom, from left) Office of the Mayor of Houston, CPS Energy; (above) Tom Lohr, TRL Photography

Our national network’s staff joins Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham (center) for the signing of legislation committing New Mexico to 100% carbon-free energy by 2045.
This year, Environment Texas set out to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and save the bees from toxic pesticides.
Our network’s staff and members sought to revive the country’s best conservation and recreation program, and to spare Arctic wildlife from oil and gas exploration and drilling. Below, find more on our national network’s efforts to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and save the bees from toxic pesticides.

53,000 Texans ask Whataburger to put wildlife over waste

NOV. 20, 2019: It’s time to stop plastic foam cups before they kill more wildlife—and Whataburger can help.

On Nov. 19, Environment Texas, Surfrider Foundation and Care2 delivered a 1,600-page petition with 53,000 signatures calling on the chain Whataburger to stop using cups and containers made of polystyrene foam—what most people call Styrofoam. Americans throw away 70 million foam cups a day. They don’t degrade and pose a threat to to animals that may mistake bits of plastic foam for food.

“We think they can find a good solution that meets customers’ needs but moves away from such harmful products,” said Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger in the San Antonio Express-News.

Thanks to growing consumer demand, other fast-food companies, including Dunkin’ and McDonald’s, have committed to stopping the use of single-use plastics and polystyrene foam cups and containers.

More than 123,000 join the call to save the bees

JULY 26, 2019: Wherever you go, you’re likely to find people who have heard about the decline in bee populations and are willing to do something about it.

That was our experience this summer, as our national network sent canvassers across the country to knock on doors, write letters and meet with lawmakers in support of restrictions on the class of pesticides called neonicotinoids (or neonics), which are known to kill bees. Their message resonated. As of this writing, more than 123,000 people have sent messages to governors and state legislators calling for action.

“If we want to save the bees, one of the first things we need to do is stop using the pesticides that are killing them,” said Steve Blackledge, director of our national network’s Conservation program.

We’re getting results. Travis County and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department both agreed to stop the use of neonics on county lands and state parks respectively.
Above: Staff from our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center, along with their allies, delivered 350,000 public comments in support of federal Clean Car standards to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Below: Scientists joined Environment Texas Research & Policy Center to deliver their letter to Gov. Abbott calling to take action on climate change (bottom right).
Global Warming Solutions

Environment Texas worked with other state groups in our network to reduce carbon emissions from power plants, transportation and other sources. Here’s more on what our network did to promote state-level action across the country and defend strong pollution standards for cars and trucks.

**Wrong way for the climate: 350,000 oppose rollback of Clean Cars Standards**

**OCT. 26, 2018:** Given the alarming ways our climate is changing, doesn’t it make sense for automakers to focus on making cars that pollute far less, if at all?

On Oct. 26, our network’s national research partner showed the Trump administration that 350,000 Americans think so. Together with coalition partners, Environment America Research & Policy Center delivered that many public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration opposing plans to roll back federal Clean Car Standards. By freezing the standards at 2020 levels, the plan would lock in more dirty air and global warming pollution.

“With the latest research telling us we’ll have a climate catastrophe on our hands if we don’t significantly slash global warming emissions, we need to move forward, not pull a U-turn,” said Andrea.

Our network is also calling on state leaders to promote zero-emission electric vehicles.

‘Impossible’? Climate scientists tell Gov. Abbott 12 ways he can make Texas a leader on climate change

**JAN. 9, 2019:** Gov. Greg Abbott recently commented that it is “impossible” to say if man-made climate change is contributing to Texas’ extreme weather.

On Jan. 8, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center responded with a letter signed by more than two dozen climate scientists and experts from Texas universities that warns of the dangerous impacts that climate change will have on Texas and offers a briefing to the governor on climate science.

“It’s time for Gov. Abbott to put politics aside, face the facts, and get to work fighting climate change,” said Emma Pabst, clean energy associate with Environment Texas Research & Policy Center. “We urge Gov. Abbott to take these scientists up on their offer, hear them out, and then take steps to reduce Texas carbon emissions.”

On the same day, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center released a new report, “Climate Solutions from Day One,” outlining the steps the governor can take to act on climate in Texas.
Our staff (partial list)

Luke Metzger  
Executive Director

Jennifer Schmerling  
Deputy Director

Emma Pabst  
Clean Energy Associate

Anna Farrell-Sherman  
Clean Water Associate

Catherine Fraser  
Clean Air Associate

Rob Sargent  
Senior Director, Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy

Bronte Payne  
Director, Campaign for 100% Renewable Campuses

John Rumpler  
Senior Director, Clean Water for America Campaign and Senior Attorney

Andrea McGimsey  
Senior Director, Global Warming Solutions Campaign

Steve Blackledge  
Senior Director, Conservation Campaign

Emma Searson  
Director, Go Solar Campaign

Morgan Folger  
Director, Clean Car Communities

Susan Rakov  
Director, Research & Reports

Doug Casler  
Director, Membership

Adam Rothschild  
Director, National Canvasses

Wendy Wendlandt  
Political Director

Pam Clough  
Director, Donor Program