



Background paper for the
"Seminar on Strengthening the Enforcement and Administration
of Environmental law in North America."
Panel 3.- Development of environmental laws and the
enforcement of environmental laws in the three countries and
their efficacy.
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Development of Environmental Laws in the U.S.

Although the United States had several federal laws with respect to pollution control and protection of natural resources prior to the 1970s, many of the United States' environmental protection statutes were enacted or greatly expanded in scope beginning in the 1970s.

- In 1969 Congress passed and on January 1, 1970, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This law declared Congressional intent to “create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony,” and to “assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.” NEPA provided that all federal agencies planning projects that may have an impact on the environment were required to prepare reports accounting for the likely consequences of the project—these reports were called Environmental Impact Statements (EISs). NEPA also directed the President to form a Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).
- In 1970, President Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with a mission to protect the environment and public health.
- In 1970, Congress amended and significantly expanded the Clean Air Act, to set national air quality, auto emission, and anti-pollution standards.
- In 1972, the United States and Canada agreed to clean up the Great Lakes, which contain 95% of America's fresh water and supply drinking water for 25 million people.
- In 1972, Congress passed the Clean Water Act, limiting raw sewage and other pollutants flowing into rivers, lakes, and streams.
- In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act, allowing EPA to regulate the quality of public drinking water.
- In 1976, Congress passed the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, regulating hazardous waste from production to disposal (cradle to grave).
- In 1977, President Carter signed the Clean Air Act amendments to strengthen air quality standards and protect human health.
- In 1978 residents in Love Canal, New York discovered that soil in their neighborhood was highly contaminated with buried leaking containers of chemicals. In 1980, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) also known as the



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Superfund Law, which made polluters responsible for cleaning up sites contaminated by hazardous waste.

- In 1990, Congress passed the Clean Air Act amendments, requiring states to demonstrate progress in improving air quality.