

Environmental group celebrates 20 years

By Helen Niemiec
staff writer

Twenty years ago disposable diapers were the rage, more and more grocery stores were abandoning brown paper bags for lightweight plastic and an increasing number of people were having central air conditioning installed in their homes.

The year 1970 also marked the formation of the East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

Marking its 20th anniversary this year, the group reminds people interested in saving the environment that plastic diapers are cluttering landfills, plastic bags don't biodegrade and that the chlorofluorocarbons in air conditioning are destroying the earth's atmosphere.

Unlike two decades ago, a greater majority of people are aware of the environment and realize that it is a valuable — and limited — resource, according to Elizabeth Harris, executive director of the group.

INTEREST in environmental issues has been growing every year, Harris explained, but interest has skyrocketed because of two events — the drought of 1988 when people began taking the warming of the earth seriously and the Exxon Valdez oil spill, because people saw the ruined shorelines and animals dying.

"People here realize that we have a problem," Harris said. "People are beginning to see that they have a role in this."

Membership in the Bloomfield Township-based organization has been growing over the past few years.

Calls have been coming in steadily since mid-December. The non-profit agency this year sold holiday cards made with recyclable paper, which has prompted calls from the card recipients.

"As soon as people find out that there is a local group, they call. People want to be involved and they want to help," Harris said.

The staff of three part-time and one full-time employee concentrates on answering calls from interested people, lobbying local, state and regional lawmaking bodies and encouraging small businesses to be more environmentally aware by recycling.

THE STAFF currently is busy planning events for the year, which will highlight the group's 20th anniversary celebration. The first is a piano concert fund-raiser Friday, Feb. 9 at Oakland Community College's Royal Oak campus. An April 22nd walk held in conjunction with West Bloomfield's Half Marathon will benefit EMEAC. The other is a day-long conference on Earth Day, April 27.

The workshop topic hasn't been decided yet. Last year's featured a representative from the Department of Natural Resources, a business attorney and a local government representative discussing how environment-saving rules affect business and municipalities.

"I'd like the membership to grow exponentially. In addition to the financial strength, it gives us the opportunity to offer more programs. And we would have a stronger voice in Lansing to better represent envi-

ronmental issues," Harris said.

Dues are \$20 per year. The group meets the second Tuesday of each month (except in July, August and December) at its office located at Nativity Episcopal Church, 21200 W. 14 Mile, in Bloomfield Township.

MORE VOLUNTEERS is a part of Harris' "wish list" for the group's 20th anniversary. People are needed for everything from an ongoing groundwater leadership project to wetlands research to performing clerical duties at the office.

Harris first joined EMEAC in

1976, looking for a broad-based environmental group. Her first concern was the chemical PBB found in dairy products, as her 2-year-old was consuming a fair amount of milk every day.

Seven years of volunteering led to a staff position in 1983. She became

director in 1987.

"What we are trying to stress is that the solution to the problem doesn't lie in technological discoveries," Harris said. "The solution is participation by everyone. As consumers go, we can do a lot."



EMEAC's Elizabeth Harris (left) and Birmingham Recycling Center's Elaine Morse are both happy over the growing interest in recycling which has the center open on a daily drive-in basis.

Daily tasks can protect environment

By Helen Niemiec
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Consumers can do a myriad of things in their daily lives to reduce the amount of garbage and conserve energy in an effort to protect the environment.

The East Michigan Environmental Action Council soon will publish a list of suggestions, answering questions that group often is asked by the public.

"Consumers have to be careful because some products are labeled biodegradable when they're really not," said Elizabeth Harris, executive director.

One grocery chain is using plastic bags that state that they degrade in sunlight.

"But people who are conservation-conscious aren't going to throw it on a highway or someplace else where it will get the constant sunlight to degrade," she said.

Recycling centers, like the 24-hour Birmingham Recycling Center on Eton and Holland, accepts newspapers, glass, metals and aluminum. The materials can be reused rather than being dumped at a landfill, Harris said.

Other suggestions given are:

- Don't use disposable diapers, opting for cloth or contracting a diaper service.

- "Diapers are a substantial amount of the materials at landfills," Harris said. "They're not a necessity. They are a convenience, but there is a serious environmental trade off."

- Reuse shopping bags. Either reuse plastic bags or invest in a large cloth bag or satchel for carrying groceries. The plastic bags do not biodegrade.

- Turn down the thermostat in the winter to conserve natural gas.

- Turn up the thermostat in the summer to reduce use of air conditioners in the home. The coolant in air conditioners releases chlorofluorocarbons into the atmosphere, damaging the ozone. The same is true for car air conditioners.

- Purchase white appliances

"Diapers are a substantial amount of the materials at landfills. They're not a necessity. They are a convenience, but there is a serious environmental trade off."

— Elizabeth Harris
EMEAC executive director

rather than colored models. When the colored appliances sit in a landfill, the paint breaks down releasing heavy metal contaminants. Groundwater can be affected from appliances in landfills.

If the appliances are burned at a dump site, the heavy metals become a part of the air.

- Safely dispose of air conditioners and refrigerators to ensure that the chlorofluorocarbons used in the cooling systems are not released into the atmosphere to ruin the ozone layer.

- Recycle batteries rather than throw them out in the trash because the lead and cadmium in the batteries can contaminate soil and groundwater. Batteries can be turned in at any recycling center.

- Try not to use items that require batteries. And if they do, use the rechargables instead," Harris recommended.

- Write to manufacturers if a product is packaged in an environmentally poor way. Peanut butter had been in recyclable glass jars until just recently, when all companies switched to plastic containers. Purchase beverages in glass containers rather than in plastic bottles.

- Organize letter writing campaigns because if there are enough letters, manufacturers are going to listen," Harris said.

- Avoid unnecessary driving to reduce auto exhaust emissions that harm the atmosphere.

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HUDSON'S

Bloodmobiles all over county

The American Red Cross is experiencing a drop in collections as a result of several large bloodmobile cancellations. Recent plant closings are leaving bloodmobiles idle during a very critical period. Inventory of types O positive and O negative blood are at critical levels.

The Bloomfield Donor Center, 2338 Franklin Road, corner of Square Lake and Telegraph roads in Bloomfield Hills, is open to give blood from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays and Fridays, from 2-8 p.m. Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. Call 494-2800.

In addition, Bloodmobile locations in this area of Oakland County for the month of February are:

Monday, Feb. 12, 2-8 p.m., Birmingham Unitarian Church, 631 N.

Woodward, Bloomfield Hills. For information, call Pam Forsythe, 647-2380.

Monday, Feb. 12, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Oakland Community College, Auburn Hills Campus, 2900 Featherstone, Auburn Hills. For information, call Sylvia Berggruen, 967-5757.

Friday, Feb. 16, 2-8 p.m., Knights of Columbus, 21900 Middlebelt, Farmington Hills. For information, call Earl Gilbert, 477-9110.

Sunday, Feb. 18, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., St. John Fisher Chapel, 3665 Walton Blvd., Auburn Hills. For information, call Bob Treppa, 373-4229.

Monday, Feb. 19, 2-8 p.m., Rochester Hills Baptist Church, 3300 S. Livernois, Rochester. For information, call John Bradford, 852-3882.