

APRIL 2022

Think Global, Act Local

The theme for the 2022 NIH Earth Day event for the Bethesda campus is “Think Global, Act Local.” This is a mantra that has been adopted for many initiatives throughout history. The origin is believed to date back to Patrick Geddes, an urban planner, in 1915.¹ Geddes was renowned for making wide-sweeping changes to urban areas both quickly and cheaply by focusing on specific actions with a significant impact.¹ The idea behind “thinking global” is to analyze a large-scale problem and then “act local” by addressing the issue through efficient targeted actions. This strategy is well-aligned with environmental protection efforts, which must address global climate change by directing our actions towards the most efficient and impactful environmental areas.

Our motivation for choosing “Think Global, Act Local” as the Earth Day theme is to empower everyone to act individually. Climate change has been widely met with apathy for decades largely because it is hard to identify. Climate, by definition, deals with the long-term patterns of weather in a specific area.² Local weather can vary greatly on a daily basis, while a single degree of warming over the historical average constitutes a significant climate change. Without recordkeeping, it is difficult to identify the relatively small changes to climate when we are accustomed to large weather changes on a regular basis. The occurrence of strong storms, flooding, natural disasters and many other effects of climate change are easier to observe, however it is impossible to blame any of these entirely on climate change. While climate change certainly plays a role in the strength and intensity of these occurrences, this contribution is hard to quantify. Climate change also affects different parts of the United States and the world differently. For example, coastal cities are likely to suffer from sea level rise and storm surges, whereas mid-west cities are likely to experience more intense thunderstorms with prolonged drought in between.

A [recent study from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#) estimates that 72% of Americans believe global warming is happening (see Figure 1).³ In contrast, the study estimates that only 47% of Americans believe global warming will harm them personally.³ The stark difference in the number of people that believe global warming is happening and the number that believe global warming will harm them personally can likely be attributed to the reasoning outlined above. Locally, some effects of climate change can already be observed. Ellicott City experienced two “[1,000-year rainfalls](#)” only two years apart in 2016 and 2018 that caused severe flooding. Across the country, states continue to have years with average temperatures ranking among the hottest measured from over 100 years of data. Climate change is already happening and by the time the effects are more obvious, it will be too late to avoid severe outcomes.

The time to act to prevent further climate change is now! We encourage everyone to think globally and act locally this Earth Day (and beyond)! The only way we can expect a change in our current climate crisis is to act!

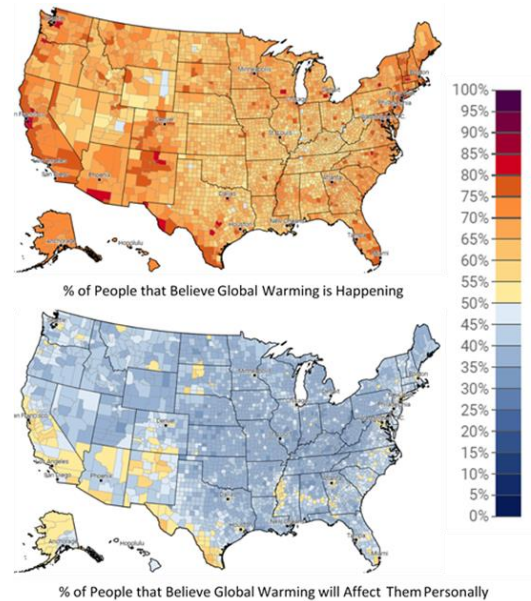


Figure 1. A study by Yale University showing the estimated opinion of Americans on environmental topics.

EVENT



2022 NIH Earth Day

All NIH staff are invited to join the 2022 NIH Earth Day event! The NIH Earth Day features activities that discuss a wide array of environmental topics to improve our awareness of the environment and motivate us to act!

[LEARN MORE](#)

TAKE ACTION



Act Local!

Every single person can make a difference for their local environment! By focusing on a specific action for a small area, we can see immediate benefits from our actions. Read the full article for a few tips on actions you can take!

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NEMS TRAINING

Did you know? It is estimated that over a billion people participate in Earth Day each year. Join the NIH Earth Day event to do your part! To learn more about sustainability at the NIH, please visit the [NEMS Training webpage](#) to view a short (20 minute) NIH environmental awareness training video.