



BY HARRY NALTCHAYAN—THE WASHINGTON POST

Tamala Bolar, left, and Chandra Moore look at Earth Day 1990 T-Shirts at Woodward & Lothrop. Woodies is donating part of the proceeds to Earth Day.

Companies Climb Aboard Earth Day Bandwagon

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For Earth Day, General Motors Corp. wants you to know that it's just as concerned about planet Earth as it is about selling Chevys and Buicks. American Telephone & Telegraph Co. would like to reach out and touch you with news of its new biodegradable packaging. Nike, Seiko Corp. and Coors Brewing Co. are running ads that plug the environment along with their sneakers, watches and beer.

In other words, the event that began as a counterculture celebra-

tion of the ecology movement has become, like the Bicentennial and the Olympics, a corporate marketing opportunity. With companies as diverse as MTV and Union Carbide Corp. signing up as friends of the earth, the commercial hype surrounding Earth Day's 20th anniversary celebration on April 22 is beginning to resemble last year's hoopla over another icon of the Aquarian Age, Woodstock.

Although some businesses seized on Earth Day ever since the first celebration in 1970 to promote their image as environmentalists, the commercialization of the 20th anniversary is opening up

some companies to charges of hypocrisy. At a time when "green marketing" is being used to promote everything from plastic bags to flower bulbs, even chemical and oil companies that have often been the most visible targets of environmentalists have embraced Earth Day to enhance their public image.

"It's Christmas in April for the polluter," said David Goeller, a spokesman for Environmental Action, which helped organize the first Earth Day.

General Motors, for example, lobbied for years to keep the government from mandating mini-

num mileage standards for its cars, but you wouldn't know it from its latest magazine ad, said several environmental activists. In this month's Rolling Stone and Smithsonian magazines, GM congratulates itself for a 130 percent increase in fuel economy since the mid-1970s and for its general record of environmental conscience.

Similarly, Union Carbide, which has been accused of negligence in the 1984 gas leak that killed approximately 3,700 people in Bhopal, India, is sponsoring tree plantings across the country and an employee photo-essay contest

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Companies Are Backing Earth Day

EARTH DAY, From D1

with the theme, "What Earth Day Means to Me."

Many of the Earth Day ads are "industry greenwash," charges Blair Palese, a spokeswoman for the environmental organization Greenpeace. "These companies should be cleaning up their acts, instead of just their images."

On Wednesday, 19 members of Greenpeace were arrested after handcuffing themselves to an environmental display sponsored by Du Pont Co. at a corporate environmental fair on the Mall in Washington.

In the face of such protests, corporate supporters of Earth Day say they are only trying to make clear their commitments to a clean planet.

"It's no secret to us that a lot of people don't trust us and think we have a long way to go," said Jon Holtzman, vice president of the Chemical Manufacturers Association, which is running ads featuring a picture of the earth and the slogan, "Handle With Responsible Care."

"I'm not going to tell you that I'm confident that because we run an ad people are going to change their minds about us," said Holtzman. The

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CMA "is saying, we may not agree with everything you say, John Q. Public, but you've got our attention."

As a marketing vehicle, Earth Day's 20th anniversary may be irresistible. The event's feel-good aura is about as controversial as motherhood. Even more important, environmentalism gets the attention of affluent consumers: Surveys show concern over pollution and environ-

mental causes tends to grow along with household income.

Still, there is the question of whether Earth Day ads will sell. For one thing, Earth Day won't have the lengthy television exposure of, say, the Olympics; for another, the clutter of enviro-ads may make them self-defeating.

"I don't think it's going to motivate anyone to buy anything," said Al Ries, a marketing consultant. "Advertising is all about direct personal benefits. The environmental pitches I've seen are missing that. It's nice to be good to the Earth, but people are far more interested in a product if it's nice to their particular piece of earth."

Earth Day also has official sponsors, companies that the Earth Day organization says met its strict environmental standards. They include the Esprit clothing company; Shaklee, which manufactures biodegradable and phosphate-free detergents and cleaning products; and Church & Dwight, which manufactures Arm &

Hammer products. "These are all companies with a demonstrated commitment to environmental responsibility. They didn't get green overnight," said Chris Desser, executive director of Earth Day 1990.

Washington-area companies including the Sheraton Carlton, which is providing rooms for Earth Day sponsors, and Woodward & Lothrop are promoting the event in cooperation with local organizers. In addition to selling nightshirts and T-shirts with the official Earth Day 1990 logo in Earth Day Stores (with part of the proceeds to go to Earth Day 1990), Woodies is collecting coins from a wishing well and donating proceeds from sales of a flower poster to the group.

For some environmentalists, the question is what the corporations will do after the public interest in Earth Day subsides. Time Warner Inc., for example, will be the sole sponsor of an Earth Day television special on ABC starring Robin Williams and Kevin Kostner. But the company was vague about its future environmental plans. "We're forming a committee to study that right now," said a spokeswoman.