

# **WED Frequently Asked Questions**

*Drafted 11/13/09 by Sustainable Pittsburgh*

## **What is World Environment Day (WED)?**

WED was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972. Another resolution, adopted by the General Assembly the same day, led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Commemorated each year on June 5, WED is one of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action. With thousands of events in UNEP's six global regions, namely, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, West Asia and Europe, World Environment Day is considered one of the largest environmental events of its kind. WED is designed to:

- give a human face to environmental issues;
- empower people to become active agents of sustainable and equitable development;
- promote an understanding that communities are pivotal to changing attitudes towards environmental issues; and
- advocate partnership which will ensure all nations and peoples enjoy a safer and more prosperous future.

On WED, heads of State, Prime Ministers and Ministers of Environment deliver statements and commit themselves to care for the Earth. Pledges are made which lead to the establishment of permanent governmental structures dealing with environmental management. It also provides an opportunity to sign or ratify international environmental conventions. But WED also is a people's event. People around the globe celebrate with colorful activities such as street rallies, city-wide walks, scientific forums, bicycle parades, green concerts, essays and poster competitions in schools, tree plantings, as well as recycling and clean-up campaigns.

## **Why Was Pittsburgh Selected?**

Pittsburgh has been selected as the WED host city for North America. The UNEP has bestowed this honor in response to Pittsburgh's recognized story of transformation and commitment to sustainable development. Certainly, the G-20 spotlight contributed to the choice of Pittsburgh as did leadership of Bayer Corporation which has been a supporting partner with UNEP on WED events around the globe for years. *Specifically, UNEP noted Pittsburgh's remarkable progress in restoring its biodiversity, improving both its economy and its environment, and the symbolism of its three rivers.*

## **What Does It Mean to Have Been Selected?**

Selection as host city provides a global stamp of approval for a community's progress in and commitment to improving its environment. In addition to permission to use the WED marks and endorsement in marketing initiatives, the UN will support the community effort through publicity on its websites and by facilitating global connections with experts and partners to assure a successful celebration.

In a sense, the UNEP has given license and a brand for us to put to good use consistent with the UNEP's stated WED goals. As with any licensing relationship, there are some expectations. UNEP has determined that this 37th annual WED is focused on the theme, "Biodiversity - Reconnecting with Nature". UNEP expects organizers to facilitate as much grassroots participation as possible and to emphasize improvement to both the economy and the environment. Additional interests special to Pittsburgh include tie in to the three rivers and matters on which our region has niche leadership, opportunities, and challenges that are *nationally and internationally* relevant. UNEP is especially interested in finding ways to tie WED to Earth Day, which will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary on April 22, 2010, effectively creating a six-week period to galvanize action to improve the region's environmental stewardship. Accordingly, after initial discussions, UNEP has embraced Pittsburgh's particular emphasis on water and biodiversity issues.

## **Will there be an influx of visitors, heads of state, security, demonstrations?**

While it is up to our region to make of WED what it so desires, WED does not automatically bring with it

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large international delegations. There may be some tourism generated to partake in public events but not likely a major draw beyond usual attendance at such annual events that fall within the six week period, such as those tied to Great Outdoors Week, the Arts Festival, and Earth Day itself. A few large public events in the city and smaller ones around the region are anticipated, but not on the order of the G-20 Summit. Demonstrations are a possibility but not anywhere near the level that surrounded the G-20.

## **How is all this being coordinated?**

The six-week "bridge period" from Earth Day to WED presents tremendous opportunity for both core organized happenings as well as numerous independently organized activities around the region. Ideally these will share a common purpose or theme designed to support the overall mission. A leadership group comprised of UNEP, Allegheny County, the City of Pittsburgh, and Sustainable Pittsburgh is adopting a partnership model similar to that used during the buildup to the G-20 Summit. There will be no steering committee as such. Instead a number of working groups will coordinate different elements of the plan, reporting in on a regular basis to representatives of the founding partners. Sustainable Pittsburgh serves as the fiduciary for a core suite of activities. It is also serving as the active convener encouraging community coordination while facilitating core activities including a global water conference, communication, and community engagement.

## **Why Sustainable Pittsburgh?**

Earlier this year, Sustainable Pittsburgh convened community leaders, including a number of major foundations, for a series of deliberations on the concept of and initiatives establishing 2010 as the year of sustainability for the greater region. While the concept was generally embraced, the economy and other pressing regional issues took precedent. When the WED opportunity arose very recently, the parallels to those earlier discussions were striking and the table had already been set to reconvene quickly to pick up on the momentum created by the success of the G-20 initiative.

## **What is the Plan?**

Building on the earlier discussions about 2010 and at the request of UNEP and Bayer Corporation, which played a key role in bringing WED to Pittsburgh, in the days after the announcement Sustainable Pittsburgh convened a small working group with representatives of government, civic and business sectors. The initial framing has led to agreement on the following three over-riding goals:

- *Celebrate* the progress made in restoring the biodiversity of our region even as we have transformed our economy, building on the position established during the G-20 Summit;
- *Connect* other communities in North America and internationally in a conversation about the importance of water to biodiversity, economic development and environmental stewardship; and engage our citizens in actions they can take to be better stewards of our environment; and
- *Change* our region for the better by developing water quality plans of action and capacity for follow through.

Consistent with these goals, there is interest in catalyzing a range of activities such as: international water and biodiversity conference, youth events, economic analysis of the region's business of water, communications and outreach, public education, public events, and perhaps provide limited resources to enable community initiatives on an application basis, etc.

Certain "anchor" elements during the six-week period were scheduled prior to the WED announcement. These include a global children's art competition that the UNEP conducts annually as part of WED, GlobalPittsburgh's International Bridge Awards and a related global business conference on energy and the environment (April 21), Earth Day (April 22), Great Outdoors Week (May 14-23), Pedal Pittsburgh, 10th Annual Venture Outdoors Festival (May 22), Rachel Carson Legacy Event (May 27), Three Rivers Arts Festival (June 4), World Environment Day (June 5), etc.

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The intent is to leverage these annual events and seek to fill-in the six week period with numerous independently organized activities around the region, ideally with a shared purpose or theme designed to support the overall mission of galvanizing action for hastening our region's sustainable development.

## **What Will This Cost and Who Will Pay?**

The core programmatic budget (water conference, communication, operations, etc.) is under development. Early response from funders has been strong but their appetite is not unlimited. To maximize the opportunity against limited resources will require true collaboration.

## **How Does My Organization Get Involved?**

Consider the goals noted above and reach out to your stakeholders for ideas. Create plans to use the six week period to galvanize your constituents and neighbors into action relative to clean water and biodiversity for the region's sustainability.

Go online to [www.PittsburghWED.com](http://www.PittsburghWED.com) and register to receive e-updates.

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