

## **Environment Days**

The Environmental Management Agency being a statutory body responsible for promoting the sustainable utilisation of natural resources and environmental protection observes nine environmental days (7 international and 2 national). International observance, also known as an international dedication or an international anniversary is a period of time to observe some issue of international interest or concern. This is used to commemorate, promote and mobilize for action. Many of these periods have been established by the United Nations General Assembly.

The Agency uses these days to reach out to the public by way of raising awareness on environmental issues as well as remind the nation that environmental stewardship is everyone's responsibility.

### **World Wetlands Day (WWD)**

It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands, called Ramsar Convention, on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar. The Ramsar Convention is an inter-governmental treaty to promote national action and international operation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently 159 Contracting Parties to the Convention with 1849 wetlands sites, totaling more than 181 million hectares. Zimbabwe is signatory to the Ramsar Convention with 7 sites protected under the convention namely the Victoria Falls, Driefontein Grasslands, Middle Zambezi/Mana Pools, Lake Chivero, Monavale Vlei, Chinhoyi Caves and Cleverland Dam. WWD was celebrated for the first time in 1997 and made an encouraging beginning. Each year, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. Wetlands are often thought of only in terms of their hydrological importance, but they also hold cultural significance. Many cultures have developed traditional practices and belief systems for regulating the use of wetlands to protect these valuable ecosystems.

Wetlands are also known as *vleis, bogs, swamps, marshes, dambos or sponges* are regarded as some of the most productive ecosystems in the world because they serve as sponges that regulate river flow, they provide habitats for a variety of plant and animal species and they help to absorb silt and cleanse water of pollutants. Wetlands are at risk all around the world due to practices of draining the land for alternative use. Construction of dams, removal of plants, waste water pumped into the area by industries, seepage of agricultural fertilizers and mining are all threats to these sensitive ecosystems.

### **Africa Environment Day**

A day set aside by African Union and is commemorated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March every year in order to heighten public awareness on issues linked to environmental conservation. Africa is one of the continents that is most exposed to the harmful effects of climate change, and consequently, the disruption of ecosystems. The minister of Environment and Natural Resources Management choose any thematic area to focus on in a given year. This ranges from waste management, veldt fires, gold panning, and deforestation among others.

### **World Water Day**

World Water Day has been observed on 22 March since 1993 when the United Nations General Assembly declared 22 March as "World Day for Water".

This day was first formally proposed in Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Observance began in 1993 and has grown significantly ever since; for the general public to show support, it is encouraged for the public to not use their taps throughout the day. The day has also become a popular Facebook trend.

The UN and its member nations devote this day to implementing UN recommendations and promoting concrete activities within their countries regarding the world's water resources. Each year, one of various UN agencies involved in water issues takes the lead in promoting and coordinating international activities for World Water Day. Since its inception in 2003, UN-Water has been responsible for selecting the theme, messages and lead UN agency for the World Day for Water.

In addition to the UN member states, a number of NGOs promoting clean water and sustainable aquatic habitats have used World Day for Water as a time to focus public attention on the critical water issues of our era. Every three years since 1997, for instance, the World Water Council has drawn thousands to participate in its World Water Forum during the week of World Day for Water. Participating agencies and NGOs have highlighted issues such as a billion people being without access to safe water for drinking and the role of gender in family access to safe water yet 1500 cubic kilometers of waste water are produced each year around the world, while in developing countries 80% of waste water is discharged untreated. Clean water is essential to the health and sustainability of the environment, people and agriculture. Increasing demand due to factors such as population growth is putting enormous pressure on this scarce but precious resource.

By celebrating World Water Day, it is hoped to focus attention on the need to address the problems regarding the supply of drinking water; increase public awareness about the importance of conservation and protection of water resources; increase government's, non-governmental organizations' and the private sector's participation in the organization of World Water Day celebrations.

### **National Fire Week**

This day is commemorated in the second week of May every year and it is meant to raise awareness on protecting the ecosystems from veld fires. The event is commemorated countrywide at provincial and district levels through activities such as fire fighting demonstrations, quiz competitions, school debates and press conferences.

### **International Day for Biological Diversity**

The International Day for Biological Diversity (or World Biodiversity Day) is a United Nations–sanctioned international day for the promotion of biodiversity issues. It is held on May 22. From its creation by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly in 1993 until 2000, it was held on December 29 to celebrate the day the Convention on Biological Diversity went into effect. On December 20, 2000, the date was shifted to commemorate the adoption of the Convention on May 22, 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, and partly to avoid the many other holidays that occur in late December.

The term biological diversity, or biodiversity, is given to the variety of plant and animal life, and micro-organisms, on Earth and the different ecosystems in which they live. The biodiversity we see today is the result of the natural process that has taken place over many years such as weathering and adoption of the landscape and its inhabitants. There has been an increase in the loss of the Earth's biological diversity and this day has been set aside to increase public awareness of the importance and value of biological diversity.

Biodiversity also includes genetic differences within each species – for example, between varieties of crops or breeds of livestock. Another aspect of biodiversity is the variety of ecosystems that occur in mountains, forests, lakes, river, deserts and other biomes. Within each ecosystem the biotic (non-living) elements and biotic (living) organisms, including people, interact within a complex community.

To date, 1.78 million species have been identified, although the total number of species is unknown and is probably between 5 and 30 million. It is the combination of these species and their interactions with each other and the environment that has made the Earth a uniquely habitable place. Biodiversity provides a sustainable lifestyle for all inhabitants if the Earth's natural resources are utilized wisely.

### **World Environment Day**

World Environment Day is commemorated on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June every year. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. This conference resulted in the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Humans have the most impact on our environment. The nature and extent of this impact depends on factors such as the type of economic activity, distribution of wealth and resources, cultural values and lifestyles.

World Environment Day and the Green Ribbon Week aim to encourage people to become active supporters of sustainable and equitable living, to promote awareness and an understanding that communities play a central role in changing attitudes towards

environmental issues, and to develop partnerships that will ensure all nations and people enjoy a safer and more fulfilling future.

In many countries, activities on this day and during this week include the signing of petitions that can lead to the establishment of permanent political action taken by governments to commit to caring for the environment.

Celebrate this day and week by appreciating this unique planet and make a conscious effort to practice energy-saving techniques, walk or cycle to work, recycle, re-use, support fresh produce markets, avoid environmentally hazardous goods or wasteful packaging and ensure a healthy and well-balanced lifestyle.

### **World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought**

The **World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought** is a United Nations observance each June 17. Its purpose is to highlight ways to prevent desertification and recover from drought. This day was proclaimed on January 30, 1995 by the United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations General Assembly acknowledge that desertification and drought are a global problem as they affect all regions of the world and require joint commitment of individuals and organizations to work together in minimizing this problem.

Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid regions that are a result of climatic variations and human activities. Careful land management is particularly challenging in the more arid and semi-arid regions that only receive 540mm and 600mm of annual rainfall, respectively. About 110 countries are seriously affected by desertification, 43% of the African continent is classified as desert or dry lands and 73% of agricultural dry lands are already degraded. Some of the most obvious impacts are increase in poverty, degradation of arable land, and thus decreasing the human and animal carrying-capacity, the loss of valuable top soil resulting in the decline of soil fertility and breakdown of soil structure and the degradation of irrigated croplands and low crop productivity.

To assist in combating the problem of desertification and drought, this day aims to promote awareness of the effects of drought, the impact desertification has on the Earth and to encourage the need for global co-operation, the education of communities to address these problems and find solutions. Zimbabwe is a signatory to this convention. Drought is a major cause of degradation of fragile ecosystems. It compels people and animals to abandon their habitats. In some countries, nearly entire populations of elephants have disappeared because of severe droughts.

### **International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer**

September 16 was designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the **International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer**.

This designation was made on December 19, 1994, in commemoration of the date, in 1987, on which nations signed the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Governments agreed to co-operate in phasing out chemicals that deplete the

ozone layer.

This invisible layer in the atmosphere protects the Earth from harmful ultra-violet rays from the sun. Should these ultra-violet rays reach Earth by passing through the thinning ozone layer, skin cancer and damage to crops will increase. Ozone depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), hydro-fluoro-carbons, methyl bromine, to mention a few, are pollutants used all over the world. There has been an attempt by manufacturers of products releasing these pollutants to produce ‘ozone friendly’ products. These pollutants are emitted from products such as refrigerators, air conditioners, spray cans, agricultural products and pesticides.

By celebrating this day, we are reminded of the necessity to live in ways that do not contribute to the depletion of this vital and essential layer of atmosphere that shields the Earth. It also gives individuals and organizations time to reflect on what progress has taken place to combat this environmental threat.

### **Clean Up Zimbabwe Campaign launch**

Clean up Zimbabwe Month takes after the Clean up the World campaign which was established in 1993, after Clean Up Australia founders the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with the idea of taking the Clean Up Australia concept globally. The resulting partnership now mobilises an estimated 35 million volunteers from 120 countries annually, making it one of the largest community-based environmental campaigns in the world.

### **National Tree Planting Day**

The day was launched by the President of Zimbabwe, His Excellency, Cde R.G Mugabe when the country attained independence in 1980, since then every first Saturday of December each year is National Tree Planting Day and it marks the start of the tree planting season which runs from the onset of the rainy season right up to the end of the season in April. In Zimbabwe deforestation remains the largest threat to the country’s forests. The Forestry Commission estimates that over 300 000 ha of forests are lost each year due to deforestation mainly due to the use of wood fuel even in urban areas as a result of power cuts, in rural areas tobacco farmers cut trees for curing purposes. Experts predict that Zimbabwe will be a desert in the next 25 years if the indiscriminate cutting of trees goes unabated.

### **Commemoration table**

<b>Commemoration</b>	<b>Date</b>
World Wetlands Day	2 February
Africa Environment Day	3 March
National Fire Week	2 <sup>nd</sup> Week of May

International Day for Biological Diversity	22 May
World Environment Day	5 June
World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought	17 June
International Day for the preservation of the Ozone Layer	6 September
Clean Up Zimbabwe Campaign Launch	16 September
National Tree Planting Day	First Saturday of December

**Bin it, don't drop it, keep Zimbabwe clean.**

***Please talk to us we are always ready to listen. Email: [eep@ema.co.zw](mailto:eep@ema.co.zw) or 04 305543 / Toll free 08080028, sms/whatsapp 0779 777 094, Like our Facebook Page- Environmental Management Agency or follow us on Twitter @EMAeep.***