



American Planning Association
Making Great Communities Happen

WHAT IS... ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING?

The American Planning Association is an organization of planners and those interested in planning.

APA defines the purposes of planning as:

1. Helping to create communities of lasting value
2. Offering better choices for where and how people work and live
3. Engaging citizens, businesses, and civic leaders to play a meaningful role in creating communities that enrich people's lives.

The American Planning Association and its professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners, help planners, officials, and citizens by providing research, educational resources, practical advice and tools, and up-to-date information on planning.

Environmental planners not only work to preserve and enhance the natural environment, they also seek to make cities and communities work with the natural environment. Cities and people have an impact on the surrounding environment, but they can also create new habitats for birds and animals and clean up contaminated rivers. Just about everything you do—from drinking a soda, to brushing your teeth, to driving to the movies—has some impact on the environment, and planners look for creative ways to lessen the negative effects and increase the positive.

How much soda do you drink in a week? Multiply the number of cans or bottles you go through in a typical week by the number of people in your school and you've got a lot of trash to deal with! An environmental planner looks at this challenge and sees an opportunity for a recycling program. Your school has a parking lot; a planner could help install pervious or porous pavement so rainwater soaks back into the ground rather than being diverted to a sewage pipe as "runoff." A planner might also help you create a rain garden to help clean water naturally or plant a school garden to raise fresh vegetables. Reducing bad impacts on the environment is a major goal and finding opportunities to assist nature is another. You might think environmental planners are only interested in how much water you use when you brush your teeth, but all parts of the water cycle are important to them. Environmental planners help keep pollutants out of the drinking supply by regulating where things can be built and preserving unbuilt lands that are important to the water cycle. When planning for water, it is important to also know what to do with large amounts of stormwater, so environmental planners have many tricks or tools to keep the water clean and out of people's homes.

Environmental planners care about the air we breathe and plan programs to help improve air quality. For example, an environmental planner may plan for more trees to be planted in a new park or along a busy street. Trees are great to look at and make good homes for critters, of course, and they also help improve air quality. Environmental planning seeks to balance human needs with the protection of natural environments in order to improve our lives today and serve our needs in the future.