

# It's our planet too! Kids sue governments in effort to save Earth's future

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.05.15

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Teenage environmental activists (from left) Aji Piper, 15, Lara Fain, 13, Gabriel Mandell, 13, and Wren Wagenbach, 14, pose for a photo after speaking at a rally in Seattle, Washington, Oct. 28, 2015. The four are among eight youth activists who petitioned Washington state last year to adopt stricter science-based regulations to protect them against climate change. Photo: AP/Elaine Thompson

SEATTLE, Wash. —Many young people worry about the future of the planet. Even though they are not old enough to vote, they want their voices to be heard. Dozens of youths across the nation have been suing states and the national government in the courthouse. They have also been writing petitions that have gained signatures from many people. The youths hope that their lawsuits and petitions will force the government to take action and stop climate change.

Scientists say that climate change is mainly caused by pollution from burning fuels like oil and gas. Climate change is also called global warming. The pollution, or greenhouse gases, is causing the Earth to slowly become hotter.

The youths say that when they grow up, they will be the ones living on Earth. They do not want to live on an unhealthy and dirty Earth. They argue that the government has the duty to protect the planet for the public. This is known as the "public trust."

## **Lawsuit Accuses Washington State Of Failing Responsibilities**

In Seattle, eight youths between 10 to 15 years old petitioned the state of Washington to change the law. They sent a letter with many signatures to the courthouse. They argued that the state has not reduced greenhouse gases. They said the government has failed its duties under the state law and public trust.

Our Children's Trust is a nonprofit group in Oregon. They help kids fight for a cleaner planet. They have been filing lawsuits in every state and against the national government. Some of the cases have been dismissed. Others are awaiting a decision.

Michael Gerrard is a professor at Columbia University. So far, the courts have not wanted to change the laws on climate, he said.

Other experts are not sure whether a state can fight a global problem.

## **Asking For Stricter Laws To Fight Climate Change**

The eight kids from Seattle who petitioned Washington state last year are fighting for the state to adopt stricter laws to protect their future against climate change.

"We're the ones who have to live with it if the oceans are acidic and the planet is 5 degrees warmer," said Gabriel Mendell, a 13-year-old involved in the case. "The snowpack is melting. Ocean is acidifying. The Earth is warming. Everything that can go wrong is going wrong, and we need to fix it."

According to court papers, the Washington Department of Ecology is working on adopting a law to reduce greenhouse gases.

## **It's Not Just A State Problem**

Richard Stewart is a law professor at New York University. He is not sure whether the lawsuits will be successful. Climate change is a worldwide problem, he says. While a state has certain powers, it can make only a small contribution to a global problem.

In Eugene, Oregon, two teens will take their case to a higher court after a state judge rejected their petition. The judge ruled that Oregon's public trust law does not apply to the atmosphere, water and beaches. The teens hope the judge's decision will be reversed.

Meanwhile, 21 young people across the country recently sued the national government. They claim that the rights of citizens were harmed when the government approved the development of burning more fuels. The youths say that the burning of fuels will deny them the right to be free from actions that affect their life and freedom.

## **Looking For Protection, A Better Life**

The Environmental Protection Agency did not comment on the lawsuit. However, in a statement, the government agency said that it is taking action to "give our kids and grandkids the cleaner, safer future they deserve."

Aji Piper is 15 years old and involved in both cases against Washington state and the national government.

"The government isn't doing the best to assure that we have the best quality of life," he said. "It holds more urgency for us. Our future is at hand."

## Quiz

- 1 Read the sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3].

*Scientists say that climate change is mainly caused by pollution from burning fuels like oil and gas.*

Which sentence gives a hint to the meaning of "pollution?"

- (A) Climate change is also called global warming.
- (B) The youths say that when they grow up, they will be the ones living on Earth.
- (C) They do not want to live in an unhealthy and dirty Earth.
- (D) They argue that the government has the duty to protect the planet for the public.

- 2 Read the sentence from the section "Lawsuits Accuses Washington State Of Failing Responsibilities."

*In Seattle, eight youths between 10 to 15 years old petitioned the state of Washington to change the law.*

Which sentence from that section explains the meaning of "petitioned"?

- (A) They sent a letter with many signatures to the courthouse.
- (B) They argued that the state has not reduced greenhouse gases.
- (C) They said the government has failed its duties under the state law and public trust.
- (D) So far, the courts have not wanted to change the laws on climate, he said.

- 3 Fill in the blank in the sentence below.

Overall, the article is organized around .....

- (A) explaining the solution to the problem of global warming.
- (B) explaining what caused the problem of global warming.
- (C) one group's attempt to help solve the problem of global warming.
- (D) one group's attempt to help explain the problem of global warming.

4 Why was the third paragraph included in the article?

- (A) to compare the point of view of the youth and the government
- (B) to explain why global warming is especially important to the youth
- (C) to compare the point of view of the government and the "public trust"
- (D) to explain why the government is not concerned about global warming

## Answer Key

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