

Fifty years after the Cuyahoga conflagration

June 19 2019

On June 22, 1969, the Cuyahoga River, which flows through Cleveland, Ohio, caught fire. Although firefighters extinguished the blaze within 30 minutes, the shocking event helped galvanize the U.S. environmental movement. Fifty years later, the river is much healthier but still recuperating from a legacy of pollution, according to an article in *Chemical & Engineering News (C&EN)*, the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society.

In the late 1960s, the Cuyahoga River passed through a heavily industrialized area of Cleveland that included [steel mills](#), manufacturing plants and a paint factory. Back then, industrial facilities discharged tens of millions of gallons of wastewater and sewage directly into the river each day. The 1969 fire was likely caused by sparks from a train passing over a bridge, which ignited oily debris on the water. Although this wasn't the first time the river had caught fire, it would be the last, Senior Correspondent Cheryl Hogue writes.

In part because of [public outcry](#) about Cuyahoga and other polluted sites, President Richard Nixon formed the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, and Congress passed the Clean Water Act in 1972. As a result, companies now pretreat their industrial wastewater to remove pollutants and then pump the water into the public sewage system. In addition, improvements have been made to the wastewater treatment infrastructure in Ohio and elsewhere. Although the Cuyahoga is now showing signs of improvement, it will still take a while for the river to fully recover, experts say.

More information: "Marking 50 Years since the Cuyahoga River fire, which sparked US environmental action,"

[cen.acs.org/environment/pollut ... ince-Cuyahoga/97/i24](https://cen.acs.org/environment/pollut...ince-Cuyahoga/97/i24)

Provided by American Chemical Society

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