**Learning Objective:**

Explain how and why policies related to the environment developed and changed from 1968 to 1980.

**Thematic Focus:**

*Geographic and environmental factors, including competition over and debates about natural resources, shape the development of America and foster regional diversity. The development of America impacts the environment and reshapes geography, which leads to debates about environmental and geographic issues.*

1. Cold War policies led to public debates over the power of the federal government and acceptable means for pursuing international and domestic goals while protecting civil liberties.
2. Ideological, military, and economic concerns shaped U.S. involvement in the Middle East, with several oil crises in the region eventually sparking attempts at creating a national energy policy.
   1. OPEC
      1. In Eisenhower’s last year in office, the Arab nations of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran joined Venezuela to form the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as oil was shaping up to be a critical foreign policy issue.
      2. The combination of western dependence on Middle East oil, Arab nationalism, and a conflict between Israelis and Palestinian refugees would trouble American presidents in the coming decades.
3. Responding to social conditions, a variety of movements emerged that focused on the environment.
4. Environmental problems and accidents led to a growing environmental movement that aimed to use legislative and public efforts to combat pollution and protect natural resources. The federal government established new environmental programs and regulations.
   1. The accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania (1979), the deadly explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor in the U.S.S.R. (1986), and the *Exxon-Valdez* oil spill (1989) increased public questioning of the benefits of industry and new technologies.
   2. The federal government established new environmental programs and regulations, including the Clean Air Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Endangered Species Act.