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# the environmentalist

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# Drawing inspiration

Declan Waugh took up a career in the environment after witnessing an environmental disaster first hand. He talks to **Helen Bowman** about his experiences

## What do you do?

My current role involves providing advice to communities on planning for the implications of climate change and extreme weather events, land use management, planning issues, waste management and designing low carbon communities. I am currently working on Ireland's first climate change environmental park, trying to develop the UNEP climate neutral network in Ireland and am a member of the local authorities' strategic planning committee for County Cork.

I established an environmental and strategic risk management consultancy based in Southern Ireland in 2000 and my professional work involves environmental risk management, brownfield redevelopment, renewable energy developments, management of IPPC sites and environmental due diligence.

## How did you get here?

I witnessed an environmental disaster as a teenager in 1979, in which 50 people died when the oil tanker *Bettergeuse* exploded in Bantry Bay in West Cork. In



Declan Waugh

1984 the world witnessed an explosion in Bhopal and in 1986, Chernobyl. My experiences drew me to study for a degree in environmental science in Sligo Institute of Technology.

## What did you do previously?

My first job was with Outokumpu Zinc Tara Mines, the largest underground zinc mine in Europe. The company got involved in a major EU project on which I worked as a research scientist for four years. After 10 years of working in the mining industry I set up my consultancy in January 2000.

## How has the economic climate affected you?

Before the downturn I had decided that my life was not going to be ruled entirely by

economic factors. I set up a not for profit initiative called Partnership for Change ([www.partnershipforchange.ie](http://www.partnershipforchange.ie)) and organised the largest international climate change conference ever held in Ireland. My concerns about climate change have had a far more significant impact on my finances than the recession.

Everything now is extremely competitively priced. Many in our profession have lost their jobs but thankfully I am self employed and my cost base is very low. I work in a niche area and have not had to seek work yet; this may change.

## What's your advice to job seekers in the sector?

Find a mentor: someone who will inspire you to learn. My own mentor was Professor Sevket Durucan of Imperial College, the most outstanding professional I have ever worked with. Undertake voluntary work to build experience, and make contacts within the profession at every opportunity. Believe in yourself; remain optimistic: the environment and how we manage it is the greatest challenge humanity faces.

## What worries you about the environment?

How little progress is being made. How the world's culture is now dominated by consumerism and self enrichment. We need to change the mindset. In decades to come, if we do nothing, we will all be guilty of the greatest international environmental crime in the history of humanity.

## What are we doing right?

An example in Ireland is the Green Schools campaign. Hundreds of thousands of students, a new generation, are now more aware of environmental issues than a decade ago. 'the environmentalist' continues to challenge the reader and inform on essential matters; however we need to push people more. Don't just think about it but do it; become an active member of society. Write to local papers, journals, go out to your schools and communities and deliver the message that we must act now to save future generations and the planet's remaining biodiversity.

*In 2009 Declan received an award from Cork Environmental Forum for his outstanding contribution to the environment*