

## Environmental pollution

Environmental pollution *ehn VY ruh mehnh tuhl puh LOO shuhn* is damage to the air, water, and land. It comes from harmful chemicals and other materials that people make and use.

Most people have seen environmental pollution in the form of an open garbage dump or black smoke pouring from a vehicle. But pollution can also be invisible, odorless, and tasteless.

Environmental pollution is one of the most serious problems facing humanity and the planet today. Almost everyone would like to have less pollution. But most pollution is caused by things people want or need. For example, cars make it easy for us to get around, but they create air pollution. Factories make furniture, electronics, cloth, and other products that people need. But factories often cause air and water pollution.

### Kinds of pollution

*Air pollution* is caused by smoke and burning fuels, especially *fossil fuels*. The main fossil fuels are coal, natural gas, and petroleum. Environmental pollution can harm the health of plants, animals, and people. It can damage buildings and statues. Most air pollution comes from burning fuel to run cars, heat buildings, and make electric power.

*Smog* is a form of air pollution. It is a hazy mixture of gases and tiny bits of matter called *particulates*. Air pollution can also react with water vapor in the air. This mixing can result in *acid rain*. Some air pollutants have reduced the ability of the atmosphere to filter out the sun's harmful ultraviolet radiation. Most scientists believe that these and other air pollutants have begun to change climates around the world.

*Water pollution* occurs when garbage, metals, oil, and chemicals get into water sources. Such water sources include rivers, lakes, and oceans. Water pollution also affects underground water sources called *aquifers*. Water pollution kills birds, fish, and other wildlife. It can also ruin drinking water supplies.

*Soil pollution* harms the land. Crops need healthy soil to grow. Farms may cause soil pollution if they use too many chemicals. For example, farmers use chemicals called fertilizers to help plants grow. They use pesticides to kill weeds and insects. But too many fertilizers and pesticides can harm living things in the soil. Chemicals from factories and mines can also cause soil pollution.

*Garbage pollution* is also called solid waste pollution. People throw paper, plastic, bottles, cans, food scraps, and old car parts away. This garbage must be stored in dumps or buried in landfills. But chemicals can leak out from the garbage, harming the environment. Sometimes people burn garbage, which creates air pollution.

There are other kinds of pollution. *Hazardous waste pollution* comes from such extremely

dangerous substances as poisons, explosives, and nuclear waste. Other forms of pollution are not as obvious. For example, *noise pollution* comes from loud cars and machinery. It annoys humans and may damage our hearing. It may also confuse or harm wildlife. *Light pollution* from city lights can also confuse and harm wildlife. And it prevents people from viewing the night sky.

Different kinds of pollution are often connected. For example, farm chemicals cause soil pollution. Rain can wash these chemicals into rivers, lakes and oceans, causing water pollution. Air pollution creates acid rain. Acid rain, in turn, can pollute soil and water supplies over large areas.

### Reducing pollution

Most countries have national pollution control agencies. In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) makes rules for pollution control. It can punish businesses that pollute more than the rules allow. The EPA also helps state and local governments with pollution control.

There are many ways for individuals reduce pollution, too. For example, walking or riding bikes instead of driving places helps reduce air pollution. So does carpooling or taking public transportation. People can also use less heat and electric power in their homes and buildings. *Recycling* programs for bottles, papers, and cans help reduce pollution from garbage.

Acid rain  
Conservation  
Greenhouse effect  
Ozone  
Recycling  
Name two types of environmental pollution. What type of environmental pollution happens when garbage, metals, and chemicals get into rivers, lakes, and oceans? What type of environmental pollution comes from loud machines, cars, and music? What can individuals do to reduce pollution?

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