

# Our Planet in Danger

## Understanding Environmental Pollution

Read, learn, and speak about one of the biggest challenges of our time

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ Environment

<b>Level</b>	B1 (Intermediate)
<b>Skill</b>	Reading
<b>Topic</b>	World — Environmental Pollution
<b>Duration</b>	30 minutes
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens & Adults

### Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a detailed text about environmental pollution
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to the environment
- ◆ Identify specific information and main ideas in a reading passage
- ◆ Use opinion phrases to discuss environmental topics
- ◆ Write a short opinion paragraph about reducing pollution

## 1 Before You Read — Think About It

Before reading the text, think about these questions:

1. What types of pollution can you think of?
2. How does pollution affect your daily life?
3. What can ordinary people do to protect the environment?

## 2 Reading: A World Full of Pollution

### A World Full of Pollution

When we think about the future of our planet, one of the biggest concerns is **environmental pollution**. Every day, human activities release harmful substances into the air, water, and soil, causing serious damage to ecosystems and threatening the health of millions of people around the world. Although governments and organisations are trying to find solutions, the problem continues to grow at an alarming rate.

### Air Pollution: The Invisible Threat

Air pollution is perhaps the most widespread form of pollution. It is mainly caused by the burning of **fossil fuels** such as coal, oil, and natural gas. Factories, power plants, and millions of cars release **carbon dioxide**, nitrogen oxides, and tiny particles called **particulate matter** into the atmosphere every single day. In large cities like Delhi, Beijing, and Mexico City, the air quality is so poor that residents often have to wear masks when they go outside.

According to the World Health Organisation, air pollution is responsible for approximately seven million deaths every year. It causes respiratory diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, and it also increases the risk of heart disease and lung cancer. Children and elderly people are particularly **vulnerable** because their lungs are weaker. Furthermore, air pollution contributes to **climate change** by trapping heat in the atmosphere, which leads to rising global temperatures, melting ice caps, and extreme weather events like floods and droughts.

### Water Pollution: Poisoning Our Rivers and Oceans

Water pollution is another critical issue that affects both **freshwater** sources and the oceans. Industrial waste, agricultural chemicals, and **sewage** are among the most common pollutants that end up in our waterways. When factories dump untreated chemicals into rivers, they destroy aquatic life and make the water unsafe for drinking. In many developing countries, people still rely on polluted rivers for their daily water supply, which leads to diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

Plastic pollution has become one of the most visible environmental problems of our time. Every year, approximately eight million tonnes of plastic waste enter the oceans. This **debris** kills marine animals such as sea turtles, dolphins, and seabirds, which mistake plastic bags and bottles for food. **Microplastics** — tiny pieces of broken-down plastic — have been found in fish, drinking water, and even in human blood. Scientists are still studying the long-term health effects of microplastics on the human body, but the early findings are deeply concerning.

### Soil Pollution: The Hidden Danger Beneath Our Feet

While air and water pollution receive a lot of attention, soil pollution is often overlooked. However, it is just as dangerous. The excessive use of **pesticides** and chemical fertilisers in agriculture contaminates the soil, destroying beneficial organisms and reducing soil fertility over time. Industrial activities, mining, and improper **waste disposal** also contribute to soil contamination. When toxic chemicals seep into the ground, they can reach underground water supplies, creating a cycle of pollution that is extremely difficult to reverse.

Soil pollution directly affects food production. Crops grown in contaminated soil can absorb harmful chemicals, which then enter the food chain. This means that the food we eat may contain traces of heavy metals such as lead, mercury, and cadmium, all of which pose serious health risks including kidney damage, neurological problems, and certain types of cancer.

### What Can We Do?

The good news is that there are many things we can do to reduce pollution. On an individual level, we can reduce our **carbon footprint** by using public transport, cycling, or walking instead of driving. We can save energy at home by switching off lights and appliances when they are not in use. Reducing, reusing, and recycling waste — especially plastic — can significantly decrease the amount of rubbish that ends up in landfills and oceans.

On a larger scale, governments need to invest in **renewable energy** sources such as solar and wind power to replace fossil fuels. Stricter regulations on industrial emissions and waste disposal are essential. Companies should be held accountable for their environmental impact, and consumers should support businesses that adopt **sustainable** practices. Education and awareness campaigns also play a vital role in changing people's behaviour and encouraging a more environmentally conscious lifestyle.

Environmental pollution is not someone else's problem — it is our problem, and it requires collective action. Every small step counts, and together we can make a significant difference in protecting the planet for future generations.

### 3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>environmental pollution</b>	the contamination of the natural world by harmful substances	Environmental pollution is one of the greatest challenges we face today.
<b>fossil fuels</b>	natural fuels such as coal, oil, or gas, formed from ancient organisms	Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.
<b>carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)</b>	a gas produced by burning carbon-based materials	Cars produce large amounts of carbon dioxide every day.
<b>particulate matter</b>	tiny solid or liquid particles found in the air	Particulate matter from factories can cause lung problems.
<b>vulnerable</b>	easily harmed or at risk of damage	Children are especially vulnerable to the effects of air pollution.
<b>climate change</b>	long-term shifts in global temperatures and weather patterns	Climate change is causing more frequent extreme weather events.
<b>freshwater</b>	naturally occurring water that is not salty	Only 3% of the world's water is freshwater.
<b>sewage</b>	waste water and waste matter from homes and factories	Untreated sewage is a major source of water pollution.
<b>debris</b>	scattered pieces of waste or rubbish	Plastic debris was found on beaches around the world.
<b>microplastics</b>	extremely small pieces of plastic (less than 5mm)	Microplastics have been found in seafood and tap water.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>pesticides</b>	chemicals used to kill insects and protect crops	The overuse of pesticides damages the soil and kills useful insects.
<b>waste disposal</b>	the process of getting rid of unwanted materials	Proper waste disposal helps prevent soil contamination.
<b>carbon footprint</b>	the total amount of greenhouse gases produced by a person	You can reduce your carbon footprint by cycling to work.
<b>renewable energy</b>	energy from sources that are naturally replaced (sun, wind)	Many countries are investing in renewable energy to reduce pollution.
<b>sustainable</b>	able to continue without damaging the environment	We need to adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

## 4 Useful Collocations

environmental damage · air quality · fossil fuels · carbon emissions · waste disposal · climate change · carbon footprint · renewable energy · plastic waste · industrial waste · chemical fertilisers · aquatic life · food chain · health risks · global temperatures · sustainable practices

## 5 Reading Comprehension

**1. What is the main cause of air pollution according to the text?**

- a) Volcanic eruptions and natural fires
- b) The burning of fossil fuels ✓**
- c) Agricultural chemicals and pesticides
- d) Plastic waste in rivers and oceans

**2. How many deaths does air pollution cause each year, according to the WHO?**

- a) About 3 million
- b) About 5 million
- c) About 7 million ✓**
- d) About 10 million

**3. How much plastic waste enters the oceans every year?**

- a) 2 million tonnes
- b) 5 million tonnes
- c) 8 million tonnes ✓**
- d) 12 million tonnes

**4. What are microplastics?**

- a) A type of chemical fertiliser
- b) Tiny pieces of broken-down plastic smaller than 5mm ✓**
- c) Plastic bags used in supermarkets
- d) Special materials used to clean water

**5. Why is soil pollution considered a 'hidden danger'?**

- a) Because it only affects farmers
- b) Because it happens underground and nobody can see it
- c) Because it is often overlooked compared to air and water pollution ✓**
- d) Because it does not affect human health

**6. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as an individual action to reduce pollution?**

- a) Using public transport
- b) Recycling waste
- c) Planting trees in your garden ✓**
- d) Saving energy at home

**6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

**renewable energy · carbon footprint · vulnerable · sewage · pesticides · sustainable · debris · fossil fuels**

1. Coal, oil, and natural gas are all examples of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Untreated \_\_\_\_\_ from factories is dumped into rivers every day.
3. After the storm, there was a lot of plastic \_\_\_\_\_ on the beach.
4. Solar and wind power are examples of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Farmers use \_\_\_\_\_ to protect their crops from insects.

6. Children and elderly people are more \_\_\_\_\_ to air pollution.
7. You can reduce your \_\_\_\_\_ by walking instead of driving.
8. We need to find more \_\_\_\_\_ ways to produce food and energy.

## 7 Answer Key

### ■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. fossil fuels
2. sewage
3. debris
4. renewable energy
5. pesticides
6. vulnerable
7. carbon footprint
8. sustainable

## 8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

### ■ ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- Which type of pollution (air, water, or soil) do you think is the most dangerous? Why?
- What environmental problems exist in your city or country?
- Do you think individuals or governments are more responsible for solving pollution?
- What changes have you made (or could you make) in your daily life to help the environment?

### ■ Useful Phrases for Giving Opinions

- **In my opinion**, air pollution is the most serious problem because...
- **I believe that** governments should invest more in renewable energy.
- **From my point of view**, everyone has a responsibility to protect the environment.
- **I agree / disagree with the idea that** individual actions can make a difference.
- **On the one hand... on the other hand...** factories create jobs, but they also cause pollution.

 **Writing Task: Opinion Paragraph**

Write a paragraph (100–150 words) answering this question:

**"What is the most important thing we can do to reduce environmental pollution?"**

Use the opinion phrases above and vocabulary from this lesson. Include at least one example from your own experience.