



Effects of Overpopulation: Water and Air Pollution

“Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.”
- Jacques Cousteau

Water and air pollution continue to affect the lives of many Americans. Since the creation of the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, significant improvements have been made to our overall water and air quality, but studies show the problem still persists at harmful levels. Beginning in the 1990s, pollution increased to levels comparable to those found in the 1970s. The following information will show evidence of this scenario. Despite our best efforts, pollution remains a major threat to our general health and well-being. Continued population growth will only make these conditions worse.

Water Pollution

America's Troubled Waters, a report by US Public Interest Research Groups (U.S. PIRG), cites the following statistics regarding the state of America's waterways:

- Approximately 39% of our rivers, 46% of our lakes, and 51% of our estuaries are still too polluted for safe fishing or swimming.
- Pollution caused nearly 20,000 beach closings in 2004, the highest level in 15 years.
- In 2004, 31 states had statewide fish consumption advisories in place because of toxic pollution.

The EPA's *Wadeable Streams Assessment* finds that 42% of all U.S. stream miles are in poor condition. More than half of those found in the eastern portion of the U.S. and 40% of those in the central region are considered to be in poor condition.

According to American Rivers and the website healthyivers.org:

- Eighty percent of streams contain insecticides, drugs, or other chemicals.
- During 2002 and 2003, in just Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and Missouri, pollution in rivers and streams killed 3.5 million fish.
- The number of miles of rivers containing fish that may be harmful to your health due to pollution, increased from 2% to 14% from 1993 to 2001.
- Waterborne germs and parasites cause an estimated 7.1 million mild-to-moderate cases of infectious disease in the U.S. annually.
- Every year more than 1.2 trillion gallons of untreated sewage, storm water and industrial waste are discharged into U.S. waters.
- The EPA warns that sewage levels in our rivers could be back to 1970s levels by the year 2016.

American Rivers has also prepared a report stating which of our nation's rivers are most endangered. Sixty percent of the rivers on the list are in states that are experiencing population growth rates that are higher than the national average.

Air Pollution

The Environmental Defense Fund reports that 80% of the cancer risks from air pollutants nationwide is from mobile transportation sources. As our cities and suburbs continue to grow at record pace, pollution emitted by commuters will only grow worse.

About 70 percent of the heavy construction equipment used in California in 2005 was old enough not to have to face any emission control regulations, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists.

According to the air pollution program of Clear the Air, a collective of grassroots and environmental organizations dedicated to combating global warming:

- Electricity generation is our nation's largest source of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Clean Air Act and other environmental measures have not succeeded in lowering power plant pollution.
- ... EPA and other studies have shown that far greater reductions are needed to meaningfully reduce the public health and environmental damage caused by SO₂ emissions from power plants.
- Fine particle pollution results in the premature deaths of more than 45,000 people in the U.S. each year.

Plagued by Pollution, a report by US PIRG, cites the following statistics regarding the state of America's air:

- While our air quality has improved in the U.S. since the inception of the Clean Air Act of 1970, more than 88 million Americans still live in areas with unsafe levels of fine particle pollution.
- In 2004, fine particle pollution exceeded the annual and/or daily national health standard at air quality monitors in 55 small, mid-sized, and large metropolitan areas located in 21 states and home to 96 million people.

Negative Population Growth – NPG – is a national membership organization founded in 1972 to educate the American public and political leaders about the detrimental effects of overpopulation on our environment, resources and quality of life. NPG advocates a smaller and truly sustainable United States population accomplished through voluntary incentives for smaller families and reduced immigration levels.

We are pleased to provide to you this fact sheet as part of our *Effects of Overpopulation* educational series. We sincerely hope you will use this information in your classroom in order to educate your students regarding the detrimental effects of an overpopulated nation. We also welcome your feedback on how to make this series more effective in reaching today's youth.