

Environmental Issues: Alternative Fuels and Fossil Fuels

Fossil fuels—including coal, natural gas, and oil—are formed from the fossilized remains of prehistoric plants and animals, and fossil fuels provide about 95% of the world's total energy.

Alternative fuels are better for the environment and often better for the economy than fossil fuels.

Learn about the controversies and conservation plans surrounding fossil fuels, and explore the alternatives.

All energy sources have some impact on our environment. Fossil fuels — coal, oil, and natural gas — do substantially more harm than renewable energy sources by most measures, including air and water pollution, damage to public health, wildlife and habitat loss, water use, land use, and global warming emissions.

Renewable energy — wind, solar, geothermal, hydroelectric, and biomass — provides substantial benefits for our climate, our health, and our economy.

Generating electricity from renewable energy rather than fossil fuels offers significant public health benefits. The air and water pollution emitted by coal and natural gas plants is linked to breathing problems, neurological damage, heart attacks, and cancer. Replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy has been found to reduce premature mortality and lost workdays, and it reduces overall healthcare costs.

Global Warming

Global warming is already having significant and harmful effects on our communities, our health, and our climate. Sea level rise is accelerating. The number of large wildfires is growing. Dangerous heat waves are becoming more common. Extreme storm events are increasing in many areas. More severe droughts are occurring in others.

We must take immediate action to address global warming or these consequences will continue to intensify, grow ever more costly, and increasingly affect the entire planet—including you, your community, and your family.

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The good news is that we have the practical solutions at hand to dramatically reduce our carbon emissions, slow the pace of global warming, and pass on a healthier, safer world to future generations.

With your help, we can accomplish it.

Together, we can tackle global warming.

Global warming is happening now. The planet's temperature is rising. The trend is clear and unmistakable.

Every one of the past 37 years has been warmer than the 20th century average. The 12 warmest years on record have all occurred since 1998. The hottest year ever recorded for the contiguous United States occurred in 2012.

Globally, the average surface temperature has increased more than one degree Fahrenheit since the late 1800s. Most of that increase has occurred over just the past three decades.

We are the cause. We are overloading our atmosphere with carbon dioxide, which traps heat and steadily drives up the planet's temperature. Where does all this carbon come from? The fossil fuels we burn for energy—coal, natural gas, and oil—plus the loss of forests due to deforestation, especially in the tropics.

The scientific evidence is clear. Within the scientific community, there is no debate. An overwhelming majority of climate scientists agree that global warming is happening and that human activity is the primary cause.

Global warming is already having significant and costly effects – and these consequences will only intensify as the planet's temperature continues to rise.

Accelerating Sea Level Rise. Global warming is accelerating the rate of sea level rise and dramatically increasing coastal flooding risks, especially on the U.S. East Coast and Gulf of Mexico.

Longer and More Damaging Wildfire Seasons. Wildfires are increasing and wildfire season is getting longer in the Western U.S. as temperatures rise.

More Frequent and Intense Heat Waves. Dangerously hot weather is already occurring more frequently than it did 60 years ago.

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Costly and Growing Health Impacts. Climate change has significant implications for our health, including increased air pollution and a longer and more intense allergy season.

Heavier Precipitation and Flooding. As temperatures increase, more rain falls during the heaviest downpours, increasing the risk of flooding events.

SOLUTIONS:

Reduce emissions

We must significantly reduce the heat-trapping emissions we are putting into the atmosphere. As individuals, we can help by taking action to reduce our personal carbon emissions. But to fully address the threat of global warming, we must demand action from our elected leaders.



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Stop deforestation



Tropical deforestation accounts for about 10 percent of the world's heat-trapping emissions. Reducing tropical deforestation can significantly lower global warming emissions and plays an integral role in a comprehensive long-term solution to global warming.

Fight misinformation



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Why has it been so difficult to achieve meaningful solutions to global warming? Media pundits, partisan think tanks, and special interest groups raise doubts about the truth of global warming. This barrage of misinformation misleads and confuses the public — and makes it more difficult to implement effective solutions.

Prepare for impacts



Certain consequences of global warming are now inevitable, including sea level rise, more frequent and severe heat waves and growing wildfire risks. Even as we work to reduce global warming emissions, we must also prepare for this dangerous new reality.