

# The Global Reaction to Water and Air Pollution

By History.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.30.17

Word Count **540**

Level **610L**



White plume smoke containing many pollutants is emitted from a quenching tower at a coke plant owned by U.S. Steel Corporation in 1973. The plant previously had been cited for violations of the Clean Air Act which was passed by Congress and is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Photo from U.S. National Archives and Records Administration

The Industrial Revolution led to great changes. Machines started doing what people used to do by hand. New technologies helped the economy grow. But they also caused much more air and water pollution. Many people got sick or lost their lives. In the 1960s, an environmental movement tried to stop pollution.

People have fought pollution for centuries. In the 1200s, Edward I was the king of England. He tried to stop air pollution. He told people to stop burning coal. They burned the coal to heat their homes. When coal burns, it creates toxic gases. The king said he would punish anyone in London who kept using coal. Even with his threats, the people of London continued.

By the 1800s, factories began using large amounts of coal. They burned coal to power machines. The smog and soot from coal are terrible for people's health. They also hurt wildlife. In 1952, pollution from factories killed 4,000 people in London.

## **Burning fuel leads to global warming**

Today, cars and trucks cause most of the air pollution in the U.S. Cars and trucks burn fuel, which creates gases. These gases stay in the air around the Earth. Some of the heat from the planet moves out toward space. When it meets the gases in the air, it gets stuck there. Since the heat gets trapped, the whole planet slowly heats up. This is called global warming.

In 1963, lawmakers in the U.S. Congress passed the Clean Air Act. Congress is the part of government that makes the laws in the country. The law from 1963 said what factories should do to slow down air pollution. Even so, in 2007 almost half of Americans still breathed in too much pollution. Air pollution can make it very hard to breathe. It can also cause other serious health problems.

Water pollution is a large problem too. Humans in the past often threw waste into the water. Those who drank the water usually got sick. Today, over 1 billion people in the world still do not have safe drinking water.

### **Waste pollutes drinking water**

The Industrial Revolution made water pollution much worse. Factories threw toxic waste into rivers and streams. This is a problem all over the world. Farms can also hurt the environment. Animal waste and farm chemicals end up in the water underground. Over half of Americans drink groundwater.

In 1972, lawmakers passed the Clean Water Act. The law helped reduce pollution. Today the U.S. has more clean, safe drinking water than many other countries in the world. Water pollution is still a problem. In 2006, the Environmental News Service came out with a report. It said almost half of U.S. rivers and lakes were not safe for swimming and fishing.

Many man-made disasters also harm the environment. The Exxon Valdez is one example. This oil tanker was a ship that carried oil. In 1989, it spilled 11 million gallons of oil into the sea. The oil killed thousands of birds, fish and other wildlife. It hurt the environment for many years.

