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Subject Area - Environmental Studies

Global Warming

Cautions: Global Warming!

The air quality of our atmosphere has been in drastic changes in the past century. Industrial revolution has cause major harm to our environment. Pollution, dumping toxic wastes into our ocean, and releasing harmful gases and sprays into the atmosphere. These are some of the cause of global warming so dangerous in the world's environment. We should take more action towards global warming before it's too late.

What is Global warming? Global warming refers to an average increase in the Earth's temperature, which in turn causes changes in climate (Global). Population growth, deforestation, and pollution have increased by a large margin from twenty, forty, or even a hundred years ago. Since the Industrial Revolution, machines have changed the way life we lived. Before the Industrial Revolution, human activity released very few gases into the atmosphere, but now through population growth, fossil fuel burning, and deforestation, we are affecting the mixture of gases in the atmosphere (Global). It is imperative that we, the people, take action on our dying environment, for the future of our kids and generations to come. Unless steps are taken to stop this progression of events, and even in spite of such steps, the vast majority of the evidence shows that the Earth will continue to grow warmer, with widespread and even catastrophic results.

How did we find out what was the cause of global warming? After doing some research, I learned that global warming is created by the greenhouse effect:

The greenhouse effect is the rise in temperature that the Earth experiences because certain gases in the atmosphere (water vapor, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and methane, for example) trap energy from the sun. Without these gases, heat would escape back into space and Earth's average temperature would be about 60 F colder. Because of how they warm our world, these gases are referred to as greenhouse gases (Global).

Do you know what a greenhouse is? Have you ever seen houses with a small glass house in the backyard just for plants? Well these glass houses also known as a greenhouse. They are meant for plants to survive through the winter time by trapping heat within the house. Since, Earth's atmosphere is very much like the greenhouse model, energy from the sun passes through our atmosphere where energy is absorbed by the air, water, and plants. Once absorbed, the energy then releases itself back into the atmosphere and then releases into space. Without the greenhouse effect, our climate could be disastrous because the atmosphere regulates our climate. It could raise or lower the temperatures, misbalancing nature. Even though the greenhouse effect is good for the environment, it could also be bad. Since the atmosphere is filled with pollution, the energy re-releasing back into space sometimes gets trapped by the atmosphere and warms up the Earth's climate.

Pollution is one of the largest problems in today's environment. By emitting harmful gases such as carbon dioxide which are mainly released from cars and power plants, harmful gases will build up into the atmosphere. The harmful effects of gas build up in the atmosphere and can increase the temperature of the Earth which could endanger plants, cause wild weather patterns, or alter land formations (Global). There are many ways to increase the effects of global warming such

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as contamination, wastes, or deforestation.

One of the largest producers of pollution is power plants. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), turning on the television, using the washer/dryer, or even turning on a light can help lead to more greenhouse gases since they use electricity which originate from power plants. The fumes of power plants are created from the burning of fossil fuels which are released into the atmosphere. What is fossil fuel? According to the Greenhouse Effect article, fossil fuel originated from plants. Plants remove carbon dioxide from the air. When the plant dies, the remains are buried in the soil. After thousands and thousands of years, the carbon dioxide is transformed into a coal or oil which is fossil fuel. The General Accounting Office study forecasts a 42 percent surge in electricity production over the next two decades that will boost U.S. power plants' carbon dioxide emissions by 35 percent and mercury emissions by 9 percent (Eaton). Since the population of the world is growing each day; people are going to use more power which would create more fossil fuels being burned up and more power plants being built to accommodate the rate of the population.

Even though there are no inventions to make fossil fuel fumes to be more friendl to the environment, there are other alternatives to cut back on burning fossil fuels. By conserving power, we can cut back on electricity which could help by burning less fossil fuel. Part of the problem could be solved by converting these plants to burn cleaner natural gas (Overview). There are other alternatives to produce energy that don't come from power plants such as solar and wind energy. Solar energy is known to use solar panels to gather energy from a heat source such as the sun. This energy is gathered and stored in a flat panel where it is stored until the energy is consumed. Unlike Solar energy, there is another way to gather energy from our environment. Wind-power energy gathers energy from the wind. Have you ever driven in the highway and seen these large white fans on the top of a hill? Well, those fans are wind conservers. They act the same as solar but by the wind. The amount of energy increases depending on the speed of the wind. In other words, the faster it goes, the more energy is gathered. Technological advances have brought the cost of electricity generated by the wind down by 82 percent since 1981 (Overview).

Today, the average person usually drives himself/herself to work, travel, going or dropping someone off at school, yet do they know how much harm it can cause just to do an errand? With millions of cars driven each day, many harmful toxins are released from the cars exhaust. The amount of gases released can cause harmful effects to the environment and to health. Like power plants, cars are only small versions of power plants, but with so many of them being driven, it could be worse than power plants. The fumes of these cars can lead to breathing problems mainly for older people since their lungs are usually weaker.

Organophosphate insecticides, such as diazinon, disulfoton, azinphos-methyl, and fonofos, are used widely in agriculture and in household applications as pesticides. Over 25,000 brands of pesticides are available in the United States, and their use is monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The release of the pesticide can cause children or people, if inhaled, to cause malfunctions in their immune system because it mutants their cells.

To help the environment, technology can be very helpful in decreasing the greenhouse effect that is plaguing our environment. While there is no technology to remove CO₂ from a car's exhaust, we can make them pollute less by making them more fuel efficient (Overview). Creating cars that are fuel efficient can cut back on fuels being used by cars. Hybrid cars (Gas/Electric Cars) are being created that let you go over 800 miles before a fill up for fuel. Newer technology is allowing cars to run farther by using less gas by shifting the engine between electricity and gas. If we are to

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make any progress in slowing global warming, we must make our cars go farther on a gallon of gas (Overview).

Wastes are another large problem in our environment and a benefactor of global warming. Sometimes anti-environmental groups dump wastes into lakes and oceans where they could contaminate an area and misbalance the ecosystem. This can cause a problem because wastes could release hazardous materials that could be radioactive or very harmful that can cause people to be sick. Yet, do the people know what the effect of this waste can cause do to the environment? As a Norman Myers said, if we don't watch what we do with our resources and what we do to our environment, our resources will soon be depleted which will cause a huge conflict throughout the world.

Do you know where your trash is being dumped everyday? If you say in a landfill, you are correct. A landfill is where your trash is processed and compacted and stored. Yet what does the build up of landfill have to do with global warming? The trash that we send to landfills produces a greenhouse gas called methane. It is a product of decomposition of organic matter and of the carbonization of coal. Methane is one of the greenhouse gas chemical compounds. Methane is also produced by the animals we raise for dairy and meat products and when we take coal out of the ground (Global).

Like power plants and cars, trash can be very hazardous in the build up of the greenhouse effect. Since trash and wastes are getting overcrowded in landfills it could lead to trouble in the near future. Running out of room to store our wastes, there are ways of shortening the load of trash by recycling. Recycling is the process of reusing waste to make new material. Even though the public thinks recycling is good, it can also be bad.

The use of sewage sludge as a fertilizer poses a more significant lead threat to the land than did the use of leaded gasoline. All sewage sludges contain elevated concentrations of lead due to the nature of the treatment process... Lead is a highly toxic and cumulative (Stauber 108).

Recycling wastes to create fertilizer on plants can harm farmers and ruin agriculture. The material in these wastes is very harmful because it could be contaminated with unnatural substances. Land spreading of sewage sludge is not a true 'disposal' method, but rather serves only to transfer the pollutants in the sludge from the treatment plant to the soil, air and ground water of the disposal site (Stauber 109).

Destroying nature can also shorten the life span of the Earth. Deforestation, the process of cutting down trees could disturb the ecosystem or the environment. According to the EPA, The projected 2C (3.6F) warming could shift the ideal range for many North American forest species by about 300 km (200 mi.) to the north (EPA). Since trees remove carbon dioxide from the air, cutting down the trees would only result in climate changes. If the climate changes slowly enough, warmer temperatures may enable the trees to colonize north into areas that are currently too cold, at about the same rate as southern areas became too hot and dry for the species to survive (EPA). Due to deforestation and global warming, the shift of climate change dries up the soil which would be impossible to grow anything. This is how deserts are created. The percentage of the world's plants threatened with extinction is much larger than commonly believed, and could be as high as 47 percent if tropical species are included, researchers said (Study).

How can we help stop the people who are cutting down the trees? By doing the opposite, planting trees would help the environment since it removes carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas. At the rate of planting one tree is about the same rate of thousands of trees being cut down. Regulating tree cutting companies would slow down the process of deforestation

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but it is still a problem because wood is very high in demand for housing and construction.

How is nature holding up against global warming? The effects of global warming have destroyed thousands of homes by floods, created new diseases, and have left hundreds homeless to the rampage of awkward weather patterns. Global warming effects do not just change the temperatures; they can lead to the change of weather patterns and the rise of sea levels. Devastating floods just some of 526 significant natural disasters in the first nine months of the year ripped through parts of Europe, China, India, Nepal, and Bangladesh this year, killing thousands of people and leaving millions more homeless. Even though some nations might get positive effects such as aiding against droughts, other nations would get consequences from global warming (UN).

The change of weather patterns can be very disastrous to nature and the sea since it alters the ecosystem. By changing the ecosystem, animals and vegetation are pushed out of their habitat and into a different location. Wild life isn't able to adapt to the new environment easily because they wouldn't know where to gather food or conflicts with other species. Weather patterns can create tsunamis (large tidal waves) which would crash into coastal regions creating erosions.

Sea levels are rising due to the rise of temperature due to global warming. Sea level may rise between several inches and as much as 3 feet during the next century (EPA). Due to the melting of glaciers, water is rising from the ocean which is saltwater and it can spread or flood inland threatening plants and animals.

If we do not help the environment now, our planet won't exist in the near future. It is important that the people understand that harming the planet to a degree can cause the extinction of the Earth. Rise of temperature, change in weather patterns, toxic wastes lurking in our air, we are vulnerable. If we want to survive on this planet in the future, we must act now before it is too late. Steps need to be taken to cut back and slow down global warming until newer technology can alter and to help the longevity of our world.

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