**Environment**

Environment is a natural world. It includes land, water, air, plants and animals. All the components are affected by human activity. People pollute the environment and damage all forms of life. Polluted environment destroys flora and fauna bringing some species to disappearance. Toxic contaminants get in the food of animals, move up (поднимаются по) the food chain and end up in people’s food.

Today one of the main ecological problems is pollution. There is air, soil and water pollution. Pollution of air, water and soil require millions of years to recoup. Industry and motor vehicle exhaust (выхлопы) are the number one pollutants. Heavy metals, nitrates ['naɪtreɪts] and plastic are toxins responsible for pollution. Water pollution is caused by oil spill [spɪl] (разлив), acid rain, urban ['ɜːb(ə)n] sewage ['s(j)uːɪʤ] (сточные воды). Soil pollution is mainly caused by industrial waste, herbicides and pesticides. Air pollution became an important problem after the dawn of the Industrial Age when the use of fossil fuels increased. The burning of fossil fuels releases pollutants which lead to health problems, causing pneumonia, bronchitis and worsening heart problems. Air pollution became even a more serious problem in the middle of the 20th century when a great number of cars appeared. Emissions from cars release gases and dust that mix with the water vapour and fall as acid rain which poison forests, plants, water and fish in it. Different kinds of emissions also cause climate change and, as a result, global warming.

**Overpopulation**: The population of the planet is reaching unsustainable levels as it faces shortage of resources like water, fuel and food. Population explosion in less developed and developing countries is straining the already scarce resources. Intensive agriculture practiced to produce food damages the environment through use of chemical fertilizer, pesticides and insecticides. Overpopulation is one of the crucial current environmental problem.

**Natural Resource Depletion**: Natural resource depletion is another crucial current environmental problems. Fossil fuel consumption results in emission of Greenhouse gases, which is responsible for global warming and climate change. Globally, people are taking efforts to shift to renewable sources of energy like solar, wind, biogas and geothermal energy. The cost of installing the infrastructure and maintaining these sources has plummeted in the recent years.

**Waste Disposal:** The over consumption of resources and creation of plastics are creating a global crisis of waste disposal. Developed countries are notorious for producing an excessive amount of waste or garbage and dumping their waste in the oceans and, less developed countries. Nuclear waste disposal has tremendous health hazards associated with it. Plastic, fast food, packaging and cheap electronic wastes threaten the well being of humans. Waste disposal is one of urgent current environmental problem.

**Climate Change**: Climate change is yet another environmental problem that has surfaced in last couple of decades. It occurs due to rise in global warming which occurs due to increase in temperature of atmosphere by burning of fossil fuels and release of harmful gases by industries. Climate change has various harmful effects but not limited to melting of polar ice, change in seasons, occurrence of new diseases, frequent occurrence of floods and change in overall weather scenario.

**Loss of Biodiversity:** Human activity is leading to the extinction of species and habitats and and loss of bio-diversity. Eco systems, which took millions of years to perfect, are in danger when any species population is decimating. Balance of natural processes like pollination is crucial to the survival of the eco-system and human activity threatens the same. Another example is the destruction of coral reefs in the various oceans, which support the rich marine life.

**Deforestation:** Our forests are natural sinks of carbon dioxide and produce fresh oxygen as well as helps in regulating temperature and rainfall. At present forests cover 30% of the land but every year tree cover is lost amounting to the country of Panama due to growing population demand for more food, shelter and cloth. Deforestation simply means clearing of green cover and make that land available for residential, industrial or commercial purpose.

**Ocean Acidification:** It is a direct impact of excessive production of CO2. 25% of CO2 produced by humans. The ocean acidity has increased by the last 250 years but by 2100, it may shoot up by 150%. The main impact is on shellfish and plankton in the same way as human osteoporosis.

**Ozone Layer Depletion:** The ozone layer is an invisible layer of protection around the planet that protects us from the sun’s harmful rays. Depletion of the crucial Ozone layer of the atmosphere is attributed to pollution caused by Chlorine and Bromide found in Chloro-floro carbons (CFC’s). Once these toxic gases reach the upper atmosphere, they cause a hole in the ozone layer, the biggest of which is above the Antarctic. The CFC’s are banned in many industries and consumer products. Ozone layer is valuable because it prevents harmful UV radiation from reaching the earth. This is one of the most important current environmental problem.

**Acid Rain:** Acid rain occurs due to the presence of certain pollutants in the atmosphere. Acid rain can be caused due to combustion of fossil fuels or erupting volcanoes or rotting vegetation which release sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere. Acid rain is a known environmental problem that can have serious effect on human health, wildlife and aquatic species.

**Water Pollution:** Clean drinking water is becoming a rare commodity. Water is becoming an economic and political issue as the human population fights for this resource. One of the options suggested is using the process of desalinization. Industrial development is filling our rivers seas and oceans with toxic pollutants which are a major threat to human health.

**Urban Sprawl:** Urban sprawl refers to migration of population from high density urban areas to low density rural areas which results in spreading of city over more and more rural land. Urban sprawl results in land degradation, increased traffic, environmental issues and health issues. The ever growing demand of land displaces natural environment consisting of flora and fauna instead of being replaced.

**Public Health Issues:** The current environmental problems pose a lot of risk to health of humans, and animals. Dirty water is the biggest health risk of the world and poses threat to the quality of life and public health. Run-off to rivers carries along toxins, chemicals and disease carrying organisms. Pollutants cause respiratory disease like Asthma and cardiac-vascular problems. High temperatures encourage the spread of infectious diseases like Dengue.

**Genetic Engineering:** Genetic modification of food using biotechnology is called genetic engineering. Genetic modification of food results in increased toxins and diseases as genes from an allergic plant can transfer to target plant. Genetically modified crops can cause serious environmental problems as an engineered gene may prove toxic to wildlife. Another drawback is that increased use of toxins to make insect resistant plant can cause resultant organisms to become resistant to antibiotics.

The most serious environmental problem in Belarus is the contamination/ pollution after the 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in northern Ukraine, 16 km south of the Belarusian border. Radioactive fallout of cesium ['siːzɪəm], strontium ['strɔntɪəm] , and plutonium [pluː'təunɪəm] were released into the atmosphere and landed in Belarus, affecting about one-fifth of its territory and more than 2 million people. Long-lived radioisotopes ['reɪdɪəu 'aɪsətəup] then settled in the soil, causing a long-term danger to groundwater, cattle and agriculture. More than 160,000 Belarusians were evacuated from their homes in the most heavily contaminated regions of Gomyel region. In the villages in the contaminated zones radiation-linked (связанные с радиацией) diseases are still on the rise (поднимается).

The need for change in our daily lives is growing. Many people don’t think that what they do will affect future generations (поколения). If humans continue moving forward in such a harmful way towards the future, then there will be no future. Although it’s true that we cannot physically stop our ozone layer from thinning (истощение)/ destruction (разрушение). But there are so many things we can do to help our planet. By raising awareness (осведомленность) in your local community and within your families about these issues/ problems, you can take part in saving a healthy and friendly place for you to live.