

Fact Sheet

Outdoor Air Pollution

What is it?

Clean air is vital for the survival of living things. Unfortunately, the air we depend on is polluted with smoke, smog, toxic gases and particles. In Canada, despite some improvement, air pollution still clogs our nation's skies. Air pollution costs us billions of dollars every year in health care and lost productivity.

What are the causes?

Air pollution comes from both natural and human sources. Forest fires, decaying organic matter, and volcanoes all contribute to contaminating the air.

The worst offenders are those created by human activity. Yearly, millions of tons of harmful gases and particles are released into Canada's air. Factories spew huge clouds of smoke and poisonous gases into the air we breathe. The burning of fossil fuels to generate electricity or to provide power for motor vehicles worsens air quality problems.

Some of the main sources of air pollution include:

- Cars and trucks
- Pesticides
- Industries, such as refineries
- Mines and paper mills
- Use of tobacco
- Paints, solvents, asbestos
- Carbon dioxide gas from burning coal
- Incineration

What are the effects?

Polluted air damages our natural and urban environment, as well as undermining our local economies and injuring our health.

Some of the harmful effects of air pollution on our health include:

- Cancer and heart disease
- Damage to skin and lung tissue
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Respiratory allergies and disorders
- Increased hospital admissions on smoggy days

Harmful effects to the environment include:

- Global warming and drought; *(please see fact sheet)*
- Acid rain;
- Crop and forest damage.

**THE ENTIRE WORLD IS FACING A CRISIS
BECAUSE AIR POLLUTION IGNORES NATIONAL BORDERS.**

What you can do

The air pollution issue can be daunting, but there are many things that individuals, families, and communities can do in order to help clean up our air.

- Reduce/eliminate car use; increase the use of public transit, carpooling, cycling and walking
- If you buy a new a new car, make fuel efficiency a priority
- Drive slower - a reduction of only 15 kilometres per hour can save you over 15% in gasoline costs
- Reduce your use of toxic products in the home. For example, switch to latex paint from oil or enamel.
- Prevent CFC leakage from automobile air conditioners by keeping the hose in good condition; have the system serviced at stations that reclaim refrigerants, or better yet, but a car without an air conditioner
- Make sure your home in energy efficient. For example, use insulation, turn off unused lights.
- On days when weather forecasters or pollution control agencies report that air pollution levels are high, leave your car at home, and avoid exercise or strenuous activity outdoors
- Educate your family, friends, and neighbours about the sources of air pollution
- Organize an information night at your local library or community center
- Plant trees around your home and neighbourhood. Evidence suggests that vegetation can help reduce the concentration of air contaminants in the urban atmosphere.
- Establish a pesticide-free neighbourhood

Sources

Air pollution and Your Health: Take a Look at Facts About Your Lungs.

The Lung Association

Air Pollution Fact Sheet. Pollution Probe

Air Pollution The Facts: Better Breathing Program. The Lung Association

The Asthma Guide. The Lung Association

Trees: A Matter of life and Breath. The Lung Association