

Natural resources issues around the globe

The most urgent issues with natural resources around the globe include:

- high rates of **consumption** (see issue 1)
- damage from mining (see issue 2)
- timber harvesting decreasing forest cover (see issue 3)
- loss of soil fertility and **erosion** (see issue 4)
- throwing away resources as rubbish (see issue 5).

Fast fact

In most societies around the world, people are using more natural resources than they ever have in the past.

ISSUE 5

Greece

Natural resources going to waste. See pages 24–27.

ISSUE 3

Indonesia

Unsustainable logging of forests. See pages 16–19.

ISSUE 4

United States

Soil erosion and decrease in soil fertility. See pages 20–23.

ISSUE 2

South Africa

Damage to the environment from mining. See pages 12–15.

ISSUE 1

Australia

A high-consumption society. See pages 8–11.



Over-consumption of natural resources

Today consumption of natural resources in many countries is racing out of control. Many high-consuming societies ignore the long-term effects of over-consumption.

Consumers consuming

Consumers are the people who buy and consume goods. Consumers purchase many items that make their lives better, easier and more comfortable. As standards of living increase, consumption per person also increases, houses get larger and purchasing of luxury items increases. Supplying these goods uses up enormous amounts of natural resources each year.

Manufacturing and the environment

Each stage of production of every item causes some environmental damage. Damage occurs in mining or growing resources, in manufacture, transport and disposal after use. Many industrial processes add to environmental degradation by land clearing, soil erosion or pollution with toxic wastes.

High levels of consumption in developed countries are racing out of control.



Fast fact

People in industrial 'consumer societies' account for about 20 per cent of world population, yet use most of the world's supplies, including:

- aluminium (86 per cent)
- paper (81 per cent)
- iron and steel (80 per cent)
- timber (76 per cent).

Plastic shopping bags and packaging create huge litter problems.



CASE STUDY

Australians and plastic shopping bags

Australian consumption of natural resources per person is 20 to 24 times that of people living in the poorest countries. The disposable plastic shopping bag has become a symbol of Australia's high consumption of manufactured goods and also creates huge rubbish problems.

Billions of bags

In 2004, Australians used one disposable plastic shopping bag for every person in the country for every day of the year! Most of the 5.6 billion (56 000 000 000) bags used each year are high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bags, the type used in supermarkets. This figure does not even take into account other plastic bags, such as those used for fruit and vegetables. Most plastics, including plastic bags, are made from oil. These plastics use up resources and create a huge litter problem.

Alternatives are available

Many alternatives to the plastic shopping bag are available, such as reusable cloth bags. With a little planning, people can easily take their own bags with them when they go shopping.

Fast fact

A campaign begun in 2002 to reduce use of plastic shopping bags has reduced consumption by about 20 per cent.

Towards a sustainable future: Reducing consumption

Reducing levels of consumption is one way to help conserve natural resources. Individuals, manufacturers and organisations are all working on ways to reduce consumption.

The ecological footprint

In the 1990s, Canadian Bill Rees developed the idea of the ecological footprint to show how many resources people used. The ecological footprint is a calculation of how much land is needed to produce all the resources and energy people use. It is a way individuals, business and society can compare resource use, and think about ways consumption can be reduced.

Changing manufacturing

Devising better ways to manufacture can help reduce environmental impacts. Environmentally friendly manufacturing, or 'eco-design', aims to:

- reduce the amount of material and energy used in the product
- reduce toxic materials produced and released in production
- increase **recycling** and reuse of products
- extend the life of products.

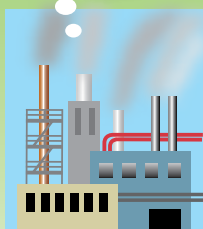
Eco-design reviews each step of the product 'life cycle'.

Could we use recycled materials instead?



Getting **raw materials** and transporting them

How much pollution is produced?



Processing

Can we use less packaging?



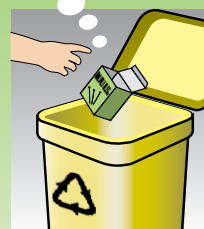
Distribution and sales

Will this product last a long time?



Consumer use

Can the packaging be recycled?



Disposal



Billboards and other advertising encourage consumption of resources.

CASE STUDY

Advertising and consumption

Advertising is used throughout the world to promote the sale of products and services. Huge signs in lights, billboards and television, magazine and newspapers bombard people with advertising every day. Today advertising is very cleverly designed and targeted to maximise its effectiveness.

Understanding effects of advertising on purchasing can help reduce consumption. Advertising can be useful in telling people about products, but it also encourages, tempts and convinces people to buy more and more. Individuals need to think 'Do I really need it?' before they buy.

Fast fact

Some studies suggest resource use in high consuming societies needs to be reduced by as much as 90 per cent in the next 20 years to be sustainable.

Advertising works

Advertising can make people more likely to buy a product. People today need to be more aware of the role of advertising and the messages it uses to sell items. This can help develop 'sales resistance' which can reduce over-consumption of resources.

Consumer organisations can help people to make informed choices. Campaigns such as 'International Buy Nothing Day' encourage people to resist advertising and be more conscious of their consumption.