

FACT SHEET: ENVIRONMENT & PUBLIC HEALTH

Environmental degradation now affects every person and ecosystem on earth with measurable impacts to health and human security because of polluted air and water, climate change, resource depletion, and habitat loss. Yet plundering the environment continues at an unprecedented pace.

In the last 50 years, the world's population has doubled to over 6 billion people and is expected to increase to 9.3 billion by 2050. Global consumption of energy and raw materials grows at ever increasing rates, even though 2 billion people worldwide still do not have access to safe water, adequate nutrition, or electricity. The U.S., with less than 5% of the world's population, consumes over 25% of the world's energy and 20% of its resources.

Since the Bush administration took office, dozens of regulations and initiatives protecting our environment have been rolled back or defunded on the grounds that they impair industry or the private sector's ability to develop, use land, or produce energy. Virtually every important conservation law that has guided 30 years of economic and environmental progress is under attack. Here is a short list:

- **MILITARY POLLUTION:** The military is the largest environmental polluter and generates 750,000 tons of hazardous waste per year, more than the five largest U.S. chemical companies combined. U.S. is poised to again begin testing and producing new nuclear and conventional weapons assuring production of yet more toxic waste.
- **CLIMATE CHANGE:** Despite evidence that average temperatures around the globe are already rising and will increase another 2.5-10 degrees Fahrenheit in the decades ahead, the Bush Administration pulled the United States out of the Kyoto Climate Treaty and has weakened laws governing emissions, logging, and release of heat trapping gases into our atmosphere.
- **AIR QUALITY:** More than half of America's electricity is produced from coal fired power plants. These power plants contribute 40% of U.S. carbon dioxide (green house gas) emissions and more than 50% of sulfur dioxide (key component of acid rain) emissions. These, and other air pollutants from cars and trucks are responsible for tens of thousands of premature deaths each year from asthma and other respiratory and cardiac diseases. The Clean Air Act originally stipulated (New Source Review) that if old coal fired power plants were enlarged or renovated, then modern pollution controls must be added. The Bush administration seeks to weaken this feature of the Act. Further, the impending Clear Skies Act now seeks to eliminate restrictions on mercury emissions and relax restrictions on nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide.
- **POLYCHLORINATED BIPHENYLS (PCBs):** By changing a 25-year-old rule in August 2003, the Bush Administration now allows the sale of land tainted with toxic PCBs. This decision has not been publicized.
- **DRILLING ON FEDERAL LANDS:** A Bush Administration order to Bureau of Land Management field offices in the West encourages expediting permits to drill for oil and gas on federal lands.
- **SCIENTIFIC STUDIES:** Funding for scientific studies to evaluate environmental trends and effectiveness of federal regulations has been reduced.

For our health and a secure future, we can and must do better. A global environmental protection system is needed to protect and restore natural resources and habitat essential for the livelihood and health of current and future generations.

For additional information:

- Physicians for Social Responsibility www.psr.org
- U.N. Environment Programme www.unep.org
- Iowa United Nations Association, 20 E. Market St., Iowa City, IA (319-337-7290) una-iowa@inav.net
- Friends Committee on National Legislation, 248 Second St., NE, Washington, DC 20002-5795 www.fcnl.org
- Iowa Environmental Council, 711 E. Locust, Des Moines, IA 50309 (515/244-1194) www.earthshare.org
- Union of Concerned Scientists, 2 Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02238-9105 (617/547-5552) www.ucsusa.org
- Safety Forum.Com, Arlington, VA www.safetyforum.com