



Sustainable Communities

As cities and communities develop and their populations increase so too do activities with the potential to harm the environment.

Careful planning and more sustainable practices need to be adopted to ensure human settlements can continue to support their growing populations while minimising their impact on the environment.

Did you know?

- For the first time in human history more people now live in cities than in rural areas. By 2030 the proportion will be more than 60%.
- Today, cities consume 75% of the planet's natural resources.
- In 1950 New York was the only city with more than 10 million people. By 2015, there will be 23 such cities, 19 of them in developing countries.
- According to the World Health Organization, 1.5 billion urban residents endure levels of outdoor air pollution that exceed maximum recommended levels.
- Urban dwellers in the developed world generate up to 6 times as much waste as in developing countries.
- Concentrated waste produced in densely populated areas provides a breeding ground for viruses and bacteria.

The Issues

Power generation, industry and transport - mainly associated with towns and cities in the developed world - are responsible for the majority of emissions of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas that is causing climate change.

Other pollutants released by these activities include carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, volatile organic compounds, ozone, lead and particles. These can cause serious health problems in humans and animals, damage vegetation and can even contribute to acid rain.

Urbanization and economic development generally goes hand-in-hand with increased resource consumption and waste generation. Disposing of this waste costs municipalities up to 50% of their budget, takes up valuable space when disposed of in landfill, and contributes to air pollution when incinerated.

In developing countries, the infrastructure for safe disposal of waste is often lacking altogether. Between 30 and 60% of urban solid waste is uncollected and less than 50% of the population is served.

The world is facing a critical water shortage yet in many areas water that could be harvested and reused is currently going to waste. For example in Australia only 14% of water from sewerage treatment plants is reused.

More than half of freshwater tapped for human use goes to urban areas: for industry, drinking and sanitation purposes, or via irrigation for crops. Up to 65% of water used for irrigation is wasted. In many developing country cities between 40-60% of costly drinkable water is lost because of leaks in pipes and illegal connections.

Clearing of vegetation, an activity associated with human settlements everywhere, contributes to poor air quality and lack of biodiversity. Urban air temperatures can be as much as 5°C hotter than surrounding areas due to a lack of natural land cover.

Less populated areas in early stages of development, have the opportunity to put systems in place now that can help prevent problems we currently see in major cities from ever occurring.

Building a sustainable future.....

Managed well, human settlements can support growing concentrations of people, limit their impact on the environment and provide improved health and living conditions.

National and local governments have an important role to play developing laws and policies that promote sustainable development. Individuals can also make many changes in their daily lives to reduce resource use and waste production, lower pollution, and contribute to a world that is more sustainable and a better place for all to live.

What can you do?

Green Buildings

When building choose an aspect that will maximise passive heating, cooling and natural lighting, thus decreasing energy use.

Transport

Use public transport, ride a bike, car pool and choose vehicles that rely less on fossil fuels or that burn them more efficiently. This will help reduce traffic congestions and air pollution.

Green Areas

Plant a tree - green areas produce oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, thus enhancing air quality. Trees and vegetation also stabilises soil and prevents water runoff.

Balconies, backyards, vacant lots and rooftop gardens can all act as wildlife havens. Plant native species that are best suited to wildlife and the local climate.

Waste

Avoid products with excessive packaging.

Use re-usable alternatives rather than accepting plastic bags.

Don't litter – you never know where your litter will end up. Organise a clean up to remove existing litter and to raise awareness in the community about this issue.

Separate and recycle your waste where possible, or lobby local government to provide recycling

facilities if none are available.

Compost organic waste. Even a balcony can provide room for a small worm farm. Or see if there is a community garden in your area that can take this type of waste.

Energy

Choose low-energy lighting and appliances that save energy.

Think about installing solar power or other clean energy alternatives.

Water

Fix dripping taps, have short showers and use water conservatively wherever possible.

“Grey water” from the kitchen, laundry and bathroom can often be re-used in the garden. Be aware that grey water can contain harmful contaminants – low risk sources include laundry rinse cycles, bath and shower.

San Francisco Urban Environmental Accords

In June 2005 Mayors from around the world met to discuss a sustainable future for their cities. The Urban Environmental Accords have been created for this purpose –see www.wed2008.org. Urge your local government to implement the accords in your city or community.

NB: Clean Up the World acknowledges the use of information and statistics provided on the World Environment Day 2008 website and TUNZA Magazine Vol 3 No 1 (www.ourplanet.com/tunza), in compiling this information sheet.



Communities taking action

Prithvi Innovations, **India** have organised visits to the Central Ground Water Board to show students the source of their water and to discuss water saving techniques.

Clean power plants operate in **Brazil, Argentina, Chile** and **Venezuela**, turning biomass into electricity for over 5 million customers.

Tembea Self Help Group in **Kenya** is working to provide organic waste facilities for residents to reduce the amount going to landfill.

Bogota, **Columbia** has a successful public bus system, bans 40% of cars during rush hours, and has replaced new highway plans with cycle routes.

Our Earth Foundation in **Poland**, work with local businesses to create green areas in school grounds.

Further Information

Clean Up the World
www.cleanuptheworld.org

Clean Up Australia
www.cleanup.com.au

UNEP
www.unep.org

UNEP Sustainable Consumption
<http://www.unep.org/scp/sc/guidelines.htm>

UN Habitat
www.unhabitat.org

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