

GOOD EARTH

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Is global warming real?

Fossil fuels threaten the world today. Is there anything we can do?



Dangerous truth: A 1928 picture of the Upsala Glacier, Patagonia, Argentina. The second picture taken in 2004 shows the Upsala, much receded.

Did you know that two Hollywood blockbusters, "Water World" and "Day After Tomorrow" were based on aspects of climate change (with a little dramatic exaggeration, of course)? They portrayed how reckless industrial activity causes global warming which in turn has disastrous consequences.

Climate change is very real. Houses have been destroyed by typhoons and freak storms. Thousands of Europeans died in a heat wave two years ago. Melting ice caps, dying coral reefs and permanent flooding of several coastal zones are imminent. People in the Arctic regions have seen unusual birds, and animals in their locality, that are normally only found in warmer climates.

What happened?

When fossil fuels like oil, coal and natural gas are burnt, the carbon dioxide generated envelops the earth and traps heat inside the planet's atmosphere — just like a greenhouse traps heat inside itself. Coal-based thermal power plants are the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions. Petrol, diesel, and natural gas based transport, CFC gases, coolants in air conditioners, fridges and air freshener sprays also contribute to the greenhouse effect.

Today, scientists warn that if average temperatures of the planet rise by 2° Celsius terrible things could happen. The ice sheet over Greenland could melt entirely. The Amazon rainforest ecosystem could get completely destroyed. Tens of millions of people could be deprived of even

the most basic food, millions could have their homes flooded and many more will face water shortages.

Governments of several industrialised countries have signed the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases in the coming years.

No says the U.S.

Unfortunately the U.S., the biggest emitter, responsible for nearly a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions (though it has only four per cent of the world's population) has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol!

Global fossil fuel reserves are diminishing but we need to do something soon.

Governments need to stop giving easy loans and benefits to fossil fuel industries and start funding technologies that don't cause global warming.

Safer and cleaner sources of energy like windmills, energy from bio-mass (like bio-gas), wave energy from seashores and of course solar energy are becoming increasingly popular.

It is up to governments to acknowledge that these are viable, profitable sources of energy, and increase investments in clean energy.

What can I do?

- Whenever possible walk, cycle or take public transport. Share transportation, start a carpool.
- Switch off something! Every watt saved will help.
- Use persuasion — ask your parents to buy more energy-efficient devices (from light bulbs to cars, the options are available).
- Reduce the energy spent on heating and cooling.
- Get involved in campaigns — whether in your own neighbourhood or school, or in the global arena.
- Be a cyber-activist.

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group