

UN-Sustainability facts:

Each person throws away approximately 1,500 pounds of garbage every year! Of this, 88 pounds are plastic. Plastic does not decompose in the Earth like food waste or paper. Every piece of plastic you have ever thrown away is still sitting in the landfill, and will sit there for at least 700 more years.

Mount Rumpke in Ohio is 1075 ft tall (almost 2x the height of the Bell South tower in Nashville) and is one of Ohio's tallest mountains. Except it is manmade – it is actually a 230 acre dump. It receives over 2 million tons of waste every year.

Of the trash the world throws out, 38 million pounds – or the same weight as 3200 average-sized elephants - ends up in the ocean. Every day.

The Great Pacific garbage patch, also described as the Pacific trash vortex, is somewhere between 270,000 sq mi and 5,800,000 sq mi in size. It is a floating pile of garbage of which 80% has been washed into the ocean from shore. It has one of the highest levels known of plastic particulate suspended in the upper water column. Unlike organic debris, which biodegrades, the photodegraded plastic disintegrates into ever smaller pieces while remaining a polymer, eventually becoming part of the food chain for marine life.

There are 500 million automobiles on the planet which burn 1 billion gallons of gasoline every day. This is enough gas to fill up 16 million bathtubs with gas. Every day.

Making recycled paper uses 1/3 of the energy of making new paper. Each ton of recycled paper saves 17 trees. The paper we throw away that could have been recycled is enough to heat every home in America for 20 years.

Throwing away an aluminum can has the same effect on energy as dumping out half of that same can full of gasoline. Aluminum is recyclable for ever and ever – it never loses its ability to be reformed and reused. With the energy used to make 1 brand new aluminum can, one could make 20 cans out of recycled aluminum.

If you are buying a bottle of water, 90% of the cost is the plastic bottle. That bottle will take at least 700 years to begin decomposing – every American uses one new “disposable” plastic bottle every other day and 80% of them are not recycled. That means we each throw out 120 plastic water bottles (not counting soda, juice, milk, etc) every year. The USA sends almost 38 million plastic water bottles to the dump every year – it takes 1 million gallons of oil to make this much plastic, which we then throw out.

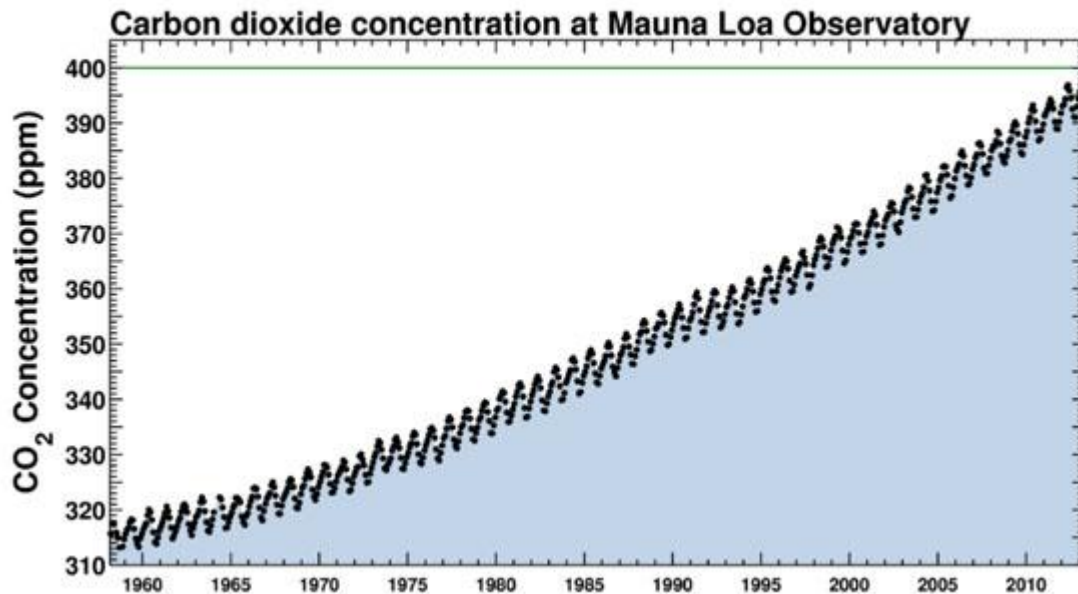
About 5,000 children die each day due to preventable diseases such as cholera and dysentery, which spread when people use contaminated water for drinking or cooking. A lack of water for personal hygiene leads to the spread of totally preventable ailments like trachoma, which has blinded some six million people. Agriculture claims most of freshwater worldwide, soaking up some 70 percent, and industrial uses consume another 22 percent. Day-by-day demand keeps growing, further draining water sources, from great rivers to underground aquifers. The rate of groundwater depletion has doubled since 1960.

Every day 50 to 100 species of plants and animals become extinct as human influences destroy them. 70% of the world's marine species are currently at risk of extinction.

At least half of our favorite food fish and as many as 90% – tuna, salmon, cod and sea bass among them – are at risk of overfishing. Further, the historic shift from wild-caught fisheries to farmed fisheries (most Atlantic salmon at the fish counter is farmed now) has depleted smaller fish at the bottom of the food chain, since in many cases, it takes several pounds of wild-caught little fish to make one pound of farmed fish. It takes 26 pounds of smaller, feeder fish to make one pound of sushi grade tuna.

63,000 square miles of Rainforests are being destroyed each year - that is the same area as 1 ½ Tennessees. More than half of the world's forests are already gone forever, mostly for cattle farms. It takes 55 square feet of rainforest to "make" one McDonald's quarter-pounder.

Current reading: 399.50 ppm



"If humanity wishes to preserve a planet similar to that on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted, paleoclimate evidence and ongoing climate change suggest that CO₂ will need to be reduced from [current levels] to at most 350 ppm."

Dr. James Hansen

Greenhouse gasses: Carbon Dioxide, Methane, Nitrous Oxide, Fluorinated Gasses

Since the beginning of human civilization, our atmosphere contained about 275 ppm of carbon dioxide. That is the planet "on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted." Beginning in the 18th century, humans began to burn coal, gas, and oil to produce energy and goods. The amount of carbon in the atmosphere began to rise, at first slowly and now more quickly. Many of the activities we do every day like turning the lights on, cooking food, or heating our homes rely on energy sources that emit carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases. We're taking millions of years worth of carbon, once stored beneath the earth as fossil fuels, and releasing it into the atmosphere.

Right now we're at 400 ppm, and we're adding 2 ppm of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere every year. Unless we are able to rapidly turn that around and return to below 350 ppm this century, we risk triggering tipping points and irreversible impacts that could send climate change spinning truly beyond our control.

Raising animals for food is one of the largest sources of carbon dioxide and the single largest source of both methane and nitrous-oxide emissions.

Using UN estimates of world population, natural resource consumption, and CO₂ emissions over the next 30 years, we can project the global Ecological Footprint forward to 2030. Even though these UN estimates assume slowed population growth and more resource-efficient technologies, the world's Footprint will grow from today's level of 20 percent above the Earth's biological capacity to a level 70 percent above it. This means the world population in 2030 will, every year, require 1.7-fold the Earth's regenerative capacity to meet its consumption requirements