

# **Priority #5 Environment: Sustainability, Global Warming, Environmental Repair**

The Environment is the fifth highest priority in our survey. All of our respondents agreed that stopping environmental deterioration and increasing sustainability in all aspects of the environment, is very important. But they gave other issues higher priority for the immediate future.

If someone is hungry, has no health care, works two jobs, can't make ends meet, and are discriminated against because of race, religion, or gender, getting those matters turned around now are more important to them than addressing environmental issues.

But environmental damage is growing every day, and soon it will become irreversible and catastrophic.

If we let things deteriorate as they have in the last 50 years, our grandchildren and great-grandchildren are going to face some major crises which will negatively affect their lives and the lives of all people on Earth.

## **Negative Environmental Impacts**

We are seeing more negative environmental impacts regularly over the last 25 years, such as:

- Forest fires which create unhealthy air for not only the people in the immediate area, but across our country.
- Droughts are happening more frequently in our country and the rest of the world endangering our food production and increasing famine in poorer countries
- Hurricanes, tsunamis, and other extreme weather events which have devastated properties, killed people, and forced migrations within countries and to neighboring countries.
- Increasing levels of carbon dioxide and methane gases in the air causing higher overall temperatures and melting the polar icecaps.
- The among the biggest contributors to carbon dioxide are automobiles, electric power production, and manufacturing processes.
- One of the bigger contributors to methane gases are gases being emitted by cattle and other livestock being raised for consumer meat products.

The list of negative consequences from what we humans have been and are doing to the earth/our home goes on and on.

## **Positive Environmental Efforts**

The good news is that there have been some major changes in the last 50 years which have occurred and are continuing to grow and develop to improve the environment and/or at least slow down the damage we humans are doing to our home. Here are some examples:

- Some Federal Environmental Protection Laws:

In 1969, an infamous fire on the Cuyahoga River in the middle of Cleveland, Ohio burst into flames when oil and chemicals from industries located along the river were floating on the surface of the river caught fire and caused flames over five stories high.



This highly visible and not unusual occurrence led to a successful bipartisan effort by the U.S. Congress to pass the Environmental Protection Act in 1970 which created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA is one of the few national legislative actions which impacts all potential polluters. In 1973, the Clean Water Act was also passed by Congress. Since that time, many rivers, lakes, and streams have been cleaned up by a combination of federal laws and standards which limit what businesses can dump into waterways. Congress has also adopted the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act. Enforcement of these federal provisions has varied depending on the political makeup of the presidential and congressional branches of the U.S. government.

- **International Environmental Agreements**

At the international level, after many years of study and negotiations, The Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015 by 196 parties. The main purpose of the agreement is to reduce carbon emissions and to promote non-carbon producing energy. The U.S. was part of the negotiations and adopted the Paris Agreement. President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Agreement in June of 2017. President Biden brought the U.S. back into the Agreement in January 2021.

Some of the positives to combatting deterioration of our environment which have been and are occurring over the last 25 years are the following:

- **Solar and wind renewable power** is slowly replacing electricity produced by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas. Major electric utilities are moving away from the use of coal and oil to generate electricity.
- **Recycling**: Residential and business recycling was started in the mid-1980's in the U.S. Recycling has reduced waste going to landfills by about 25%. Some countries have increased recycling to 50% of its waste.
- **Conservation**: Buildings and appliances are built to be more energy efficient. Cars have become more fuel-efficient
- **The Sustainable Business Network** Many businesses are finding that they can increase their bottom line by sharing and using more environmentally friendly business practices. One such group is the Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council: [Wisconsin Sustainable Business Council \(wisconsinsustainability.com\)](http://wisconsinsustainability.com) Many other states have similar organizations.
- **Sustainable Agriculture** Many states are promoting more environmentally friendly agricultural practices. One such group is the Wisconsin Sustainable Agriculture network: [Wisconsin Sustainable Agriculture – Cooperative Extension](http://wisconsinagriculture.com) Again, many states have similar organizations.
- **Electric Cars** are quickly becoming the main production focus of auto manufacturers in the U.S. and across the world.
- **Local Environmental Groups** are proliferating around the country. One example of such a group is Greening Greater Racine <http://greeninggreaterracine.weebly.com/> Greening Greater Racine has worked for with a broad range of individuals and over 25 not for profit, governmental, and business organizations to promote a healthy environmental future for businesses, schools, churches, and the community at large.
- **Local Governments**: cities, towns, villages, counties, and regional groups are addressing environmental issues at their level of governance. Many local governments now have added Sustainability Departments to their organizational structure in order to address environmental concerns in their communities.

## **The Future: We Can All Make a Difference Every Day By the Choices We Make**

- **Recycle** everything you can (paper, plastics, bottles, cardboard, etc.) which will be picked up by the recycling company which serves your community or business.
- **Recycle for Reuse** your clothing, furniture, and other household furnishings using Goodwill or other not for profit organizations which will get those items to people who can and will use them

- Compost as much of your fruits and vegetables as you can to be used in your garden or around plants and trees around your home.
- Buy Recycled Paper and Other Products as often as you can and as they are available.
- Join a Local Environmental Organization such as the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Nature Sanctuary, Arboretum, Nature Center, Water Conservancy, etc. There are numerous groups in every community across the U.S. which are making a positive difference in the environment in which we live. What we do locally contributes to an overall better environment for the world as a whole.
- Modify Our Consumer Economy Mindset: Adopt an ethic of enough, not more. Almost everything we buy has a negative impact on our environment both through its creation and how we dispose of things. We all need many things to survive and function in the world in which we live. But not buying more than we really need is something we can all do, and it is better for our world and the world we are passing down to the next generations.
- Seek Full Human Development and Quality of Life for yourself, your family, friends, and community while still being able to have enough material things to sustain a good and healthy life.
- Support Businesses and Governmental Organizations which do their work in ways which minimize environmental damage and contribute to environmental improvements and sustainable communities and quality of life.

In closing, I just want to say that this article on the Survey results has been the most challenging one to write.

The topic of the environment is an international problem which we must address.

It is a problem which is caused by many contributors including businesses, governments, and each of us as individuals.

There is no simple answer to how to reduce our negative environmental impacts.

It will take creativity and cooperation among all of us as individuals and private, public, and not for profit organizations to change the environmental path we are on,

I never claim to have all the answers. No one does. But we need the very best from all of us to leave a livable world for coming generations.

**Let's All Do Our Part**