

# Pollution Fact Sheet

*"There's so much pollution in the air now that if it weren't for our lungs there'd be no place to put it all." - Robert Orben*

## About pollution

There are many different types of pollution, the main ones being air pollution, water pollution and land pollution.

**Air Pollution** - Air pollution is a nasty little beast. It's almost impossible to see, it moves on the wind and can travel great distances. It knows no borders and respects no countries. It settles on the land and water, causing massive problems for our environment and us. Some types of air pollution get more attention than others. Carbon Dioxide and Methane are two seriously nasty pollutants that are directly attributing to global warming and climate change.

**Water Pollution** - Our water is also in a bit of strife. Activities that we do on land can affect the quality of our water. Our waste often gets washed into our waterways and coasts without any treatment. This waste might be the big bits that you can see like plastic bags, dead animals and ciggie butts. But it's also the tiny, microscopic nasties that we can't see. They build up and pollute our water to such an extent that waterways become unliveable for native plants, fish and animals.

**Land Pollution** - As for our land, well the story doesn't improve much. Salinity alone is a huge problem. There are two types of salinity: dryland salinity and soil salinity. Dryland salinity is so bad in some parts of our country that it is sometimes known as "white death", and currently affects more than 5 million hectares of land and causing damage in excess of \$270 million each year. The National Land and Water Resources Audit estimates that another 5.7 million hectares have a high potential for the development of dryland salinity, and they predict this to rise to 17 million hectares by 2050.

## Other types of pollution include:

**Radioactive contamination** - coming from nuclear fuels, waste from the use of radioactive materials in science and medicine, fallout from nuclear explosions.

**Noise pollution** - ranging from traffic noise to sound waves from navy sonar equipment, which can interfere with the natural movement patterns of animals.

**Light pollution** - light from cities and tall buildings cause animals to become disoriented.

**Thermal (heat) pollution** - unnaturally low or high temperatures, such as water released from power plants into colder waterways, which can be harmful to aquatic life.



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## Did you know?

\* **85% of Australian households do the wrong thing with their hazardous waste**, getting rid of their hazardous waste (including pharmaceutical drugs), batteries, oven cleaners, fluoro lights and garden chemicals through their curb side rubbish collection instead of taking them to their local waste management facility. (1)

\* During the 1970's **scientists and environmentalists started asking people to stop using hairspray** from aerosol cans because of the CFC's they contained. Although this was a big ask as hair was big back then both the people and the companies making spray cans jumped on board and quickly phased out CFCs and other ozone-depleting materials. (2)

\* **Since the 1960s** (and before the Gulf of Mexico spill) around 1,444,000 tonnes of oil had been spilled from oil well blow outs and well failures worldwide, compared to 7,325,000 tonnes from ships. (3)

\* **Pesticide use** reduces biodiversity, reduces nitrogen fixation, contributes to pollinator decline, destroys habitat (especially for birds), and threatens endangered species. Over 98% of sprayed insecticides and 95% of herbicides reach a destination other than their target species, including non-target species, air, water and soil. (4)

\* **"Everyone has some amount of dioxin in his or her body, and the average level is already high enough to endanger health."** - Lois Gibbs (5)

\* **A single flight from Sydney to Melbourne** produces about 250kg of CO2 per person. (6)

\* According to the UN, pollution, **our growing population and global warming** will combine to cut the average person's water supply by a third over the next 20 years. (7)

\* **Air pollution is responsible for about 2.5% of all deaths in Australia**, and causes more premature deaths in NSW than road accidents. (8)

\* **884 million people**, almost all of them living in developing countries, are reliant on contaminated water sources. (9)

\* **The King River in Tasmania is arguably Australia's most polluted river**, suffering from a severe acidic condition related to mining operations. About 1.5 million tonnes of sulfidic tailings entered the river system each year up to 1995, along with huge volumes of acidic, metal-rich water flowing from the workings. The acidity King rivers has increased, and dissolved metal concentrations have greatly increased to levels highly toxic to aquatic life. (10)



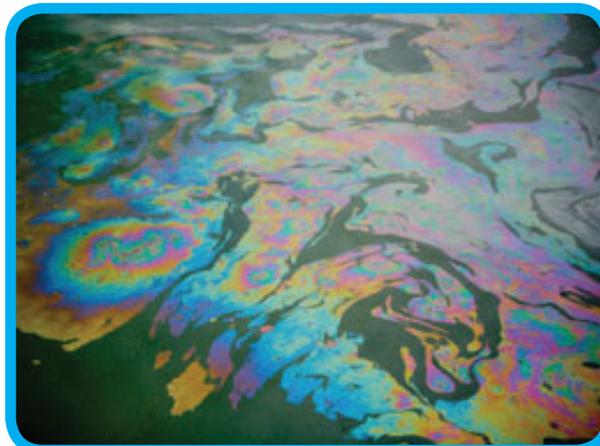
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## What can you do about pollution?

It seems that just about everything we do can cause pollution. There is good news: in most cases, there are easy ways to reduce or even stop the pollution.

### Water pollution

- \* **Dispose of paints, solvents, garden chemicals, and old motor oils properly** by taking them to your local waste management facility. Never, ever pour them down the drain.
- \* **Make sure you bin everything properly.** Don't let things blow out of your bin and into the gutter. This stuff will only end up in a creek, river, the sea or the stomach of some marine animal.
- \* **Fix your oil leaks and service your car regularly.** Oil leaks wash into the gutter and get carried to creeks, rivers and the sea during storm events.
- \* **Same for dog poo.**



### Air pollution

- \* **Drive smoothly and plan your trips** - you'll arrive just as quickly and save more on fuel.
- \* **Keep your car's tyres inflated.** You'll drive more efficiently and save cash on petrol.
- \* **Try riding a bike or walking** instead of using a car.
- \* **Use public transport** wherever you can.
- \* **Limit your wood fireplaces** to romantic weekends or special occasions. Wood fires are a significant contributor to air pollution, whether in the form of bushfires or keeping people warm.
- \* **Report smoky vehicles.** We know it's not nice to be a dibber-dobber but if someone's car is really making a big stink, then you have to let them know.
- \* **Buy green energy.** Pollution from coal-fired energy is not only warming up the planet it's also pouring stuff into the air that's bad for your lungs.

### Land pollution

- \* **By eating organic or pesticide-free** wherever you can you'll be saving nasty pesticides from polluting the land AND the water. Or better still, grow your own food!
- \* **Set up a compost bin** and save half your rubbish going to landfill.
- \* **Say no to plastic bags.** They're full of all sorts of nasties that contribute to land and water pollution. Yuk!!!

Visit [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org) for more tips and information on pollution.



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## References:

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10. Government of Tasmania, 2003, *State of the Environment*, <http://soer.justice.tas.gov.au/2003/casestudy/16/index.php>



## Useful links:

National Pollution Inventory: [www.npi.gov.au](http://www.npi.gov.au)

CSIRO: [www.csiro.au/science/Pollution](http://www.csiro.au/science/Pollution)

Also visit the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) or Department of Environment in your state or territory.

Visit [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org) for more information on pollution.

For more information on how you can help our environment, or to make some suggestions of your own, please go to [www.coolaustralia.org](http://www.coolaustralia.org)



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