

# First place winning essay

There is no "most important environmental problem." As I see it, all the problems are interrelated. They all will eventually affect us. The world is like a ticking bomb, and we don't know what will set it off, or when. The time for action is now. Only we can make the beautiful earth we inhabit today remain this way for future generations.

The principal problem lies right here in our hands. If it is not recycled, this paper, along with the other 100 pounds of trash produced by families in a week, will either be dumped into a landfill or burned in an incinerator. Those two "solutions" to a solid waste problem only expand into other areas of pollution. The unsightly landfills use up our precious land space and contaminate our lakes and rivers while incinerators emit dioxides into the air we breathe. These extremely harmful gases travel upward to the ozone, a thin layer of atmosphere which protects our Earth from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Destruction of the ozone can cause tremendous changes. The earth will literally heat up. Scientists predict a temperature rise between three and nine degrees in the next century. Glaciers will melt and cause floods, farm land will be worthless due to droughts, and many animals such as humans will no longer be able to live in these extra hot conditions.

These causes and effects are dependent on humans and how we deal with our actions. For example, the rapid deforestation of tropical rainforests not only releases carbon dioxide into the air, adding to global warming, but it is killing the most diverse areas of plant and animal life in the world. We are

just now finding out how precious these forests are. For instance, they have contributed a great deal to the world of medicine. Derivatives of the rosy periwinkle were used in the cure for childhood leukemia. Who knows what other cures lurk in the lush rainforests?



**Plute**

Basically, what it all boils down to is us. We are the only beings who can lend a hand to our Mother Earth and put her back on her feet again. The endangered animals, polluted oceans and smoggy skies can't speak for themselves. We need to see what's happening and

be their voices.

Environmental education is the key.

In order to become truly aware of the issues, the long-term causes, and what we can do to help, we must be educated. The learning can start at any age. Whether you're a first-grader or a senior citizen, there are numerous ways to expand your environmental knowledge. Examples include school, national clubs and organizations, nature parks, community education programs and books.

In conclusion, we must educate ourselves. The more we know about what can be done to save our Earth, the faster she can get back on the road to recovery. We're playing a global game of roulette, and nobody knows when the wheel will stop spinning, let alone whether humankind will win the gamble.

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