



**New Internationalist**  
The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

# THE AIR WE BREATHE

NEW INTERNATIONALIST EASIER ENGLISH WIKI READY LESSON



WHICH PHOTO SHOWS:  
A) A COURT CASE WHERE  
SOMEONE DIED FROM ASTHMA  
BECAUSE OF TRAFFIC  
POLLUTION  
B) POLLUTION FROM COAL  
C) WEARING A GAS MASK IN A  
FIRE IN KENYA

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# QUICK QUIZ:

1/ How many people die around the world every year from air pollution?

70,000      700,000      7,000,000

2/ What percentage of people in the world breathe air that is unsafe (according to WHO guidelines)?      70%      80%      90%

3/ How many people die every year from air pollution from agricultural and forest fires?      3,390      33,900      339,000

4/ Which of these can be effects of air pollution?:

heart disease      dementia      lung cancer



In a normal year on planet Earth more than seven million people die because of air pollution. Like Covid-19, the most vulnerable people are usually affected the worst, but nobody is immune. Humans have many differences, but we all need to breathe. But more than 90 per cent of us are breathing air that is unsafe and goes against WHO pollution guidelines. Often, thinking it is bringing progress and comfort, we are filling our lives with poison – in our towns and cities, in the countryside, and inside our homes.

Air pollution is damaging to almost every organ and cell in the human body. The effects can start before birth, with soot found on placentas. Then it gets worse. Research shows that air pollution has effects on growth, intelligence, and development of the brain and co-ordination. Harming babies and children will have effects long into the future and can stop their lungs growing permanently. Dirty air can make asthma a lot worse. It can be linked to heart disease, stroke, breathing problems, lung cancer, dementia and psychological problems. It's not just the long-term health issues: there can also be short-term problems such as sneezing and coughing, eye irritation, headaches and dizziness.

We cannot separate the air pollution crisis and the climate crisis. Many types of air pollution could be reduced at the same time as greenhouse gases, as they come from the same sources. Climate change causes heatwaves - and these make pollution worse. Diesel cars produce more pollution on hot days. Global air pollution from agricultural and forest fires (these are made worse by climate change) probably causes 339,000 early deaths each year.

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## MATCH:

1. immune

2. irritation

3. soot

4. placenta

5. to sneeze

6. to cough

7. environmental  
hazard

8. waste disposal

a) The organ inside the mother's body that feeds the unborn baby

b) Dirty black powder from burning carbon

c) When you can't get a disease because you are protected from it

d) Getting rid of and destroying rubbish

e) A rash or itch on the skin because of something eg. a chemical

f) To make a sudden noise from air coming from your lungs

g) To make a sudden noise from air coming from your nose and mouth

h) Something that is dangerous to the environment or people's health

KEY:

1. immune c
2. irritation e
3. soot b
4. placenta a
5. to sneeze g
6. to cough f
7. environmental hazard h
8. waste disposal d

- a) The organ inside the mother's body that feeds the unborn baby
- b) Dirty black powder from burning carbon
- c) When you can't get a disease because you are protected from it
- d) Getting rid of and destroying rubbish
- e) A rash or itch on the skin because of something eg. a chemical
- f) To make a sudden noise from air coming from your lungs
- g) To make a sudden noise from air coming from your nose and mouth
- h) Something that is dangerous to the environment or people's health

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HOW ARE THESE TYPES OF INEQUALITY RELATED TO AIR POLLUTION?:

- Race
- Gender
- Health
- Poverty



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TRY TO LINK THESE IDEAS WITH LINKERS OF  
CONTRAST:  
WHEREAS, HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH

eg.

Richer people can buy air purifiers for their homes, whereas poorer people can't afford these.

Now read the next slide to get more ideas and write more sentences about the different types of injustice >>>>>>>

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Poorer countries have more air pollution. Richer countries send their waste to other areas and get cheaper production by paying others to produce their goods. 22 per cent of air pollution-related deaths in the world are from goods and services produced in one region, for use by another region.

There is more inequality in health in poor areas, and pollution makes these worse. Poor communities often live near environmental hazards eg. big roads, power plants and waste disposal. The effects can be worse because of poor housing, poor quality of air in the home, the stress of living with little money, and limited access to healthy food and/or green space.

People with money can choose to move out of cities like Beijing, London and Delhi when pollution gets really bad, or stay in buildings with pure air if air quality is bad. People who have to live or work in the streets, or in factories or energy plants do not have this choice. In houses, coal for cooking and light is the main indoor air pollution. A quarter of households in poorer cities rely on solid fuels for cooking. Those families can suffer from polluted air inside and outside the home. And women and girls suffer most.

Air pollution is also an issue of racial justice. People living in Africa and other parts of the Global South more affected by air pollution, and black, brown and indigenous people in Western countries are also more affected. One study found that white people in the US breathed in 17 per cent less pollution than they create. This 'pollution advantage' is a big contrast to the disadvantage of black and Hispanic people – they experience [56 per cent and 63 per cent](#) more pollution than they create.

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# WRITING:

Imagine you are the planet Earth - you are feeling

very angry at how polluted the air is

Write a letter to all people and tell them:

- some of the facts and figures
- how you feel about the air pollution
- what you want them to do about it

Challenge: use all 8 new words: **immune, irritation, soot, placenta, to sneeze, to cough, environmental hazard, waste disposal**



# FOLLOW-UP:



Read more about the fight for clean air in Issue 525 of New Internationalist at: [newint.org](https://newint.org)

Easier English version:  
[eewiki.newint.org](https://eewiki.newint.org)