25 Cigarettes a Day

Imagine that your whole family is stuck inside your house. The air pollution where you live is off the charts, and school has been canceled. The flight that your best friend's grandmother is coming on won't be arriving, because the pilot can't see through the thick haze of pollution in the sky. Against your better judgement, you open the back door and step outside. But, as they say, curiosity killed the cat, and your efforts are rewarded with hacking coughs and teary eyes (time.com). It's even worse for your grandfather, who has asthma, and is coughing even when he is inside the house. Believe it or not, events like this happen all over the world. This is an example of urban air pollution, which effects plenty of cities in a lot of countries. One of the most polluted cities in the world is New Delhi, India (cbsnews.com). New Delhi currently has some of the worst air pollution in the world, one estimate saying that one day of breathing air in New Delhi is equal to smoking 25 cigarettes (time.com)! In fact, air pollution- related diseases, such as asthma and lung cancer, kill 7 million people a year, which is something that should not be happening (time.com). We can help prevent air pollution from killing off so many by first finding out the causes of it.

Urban air pollution relates to sustainable development goal (SDG) #11, sustainable cities and communities. New Delhi is currently not sustainable, and the three main contributors to that are stubble burning (when farmers burn their crops to clear fields), transportation (brookings.edu), and industry and construction (orfonline.org). When stubble burning occurs, toxic pollutants and gases, such as methane and carbon monoxide, are released into the world. They're able to travel many kilometers, so even if the farm where the burning happened is far away, it's likely that the pollutants will still reach a city (aqi.in). Next, transportation is the

biggest source of PM2.5 (particulate matter) emissions in New Delhi , making up 41 percent of

the total pollution in the city (orfonline.org). New Delhi is also surrounded by a belt of industrial

buildings, which make up 18.6 percent of the pollution, and the construction around the area

makes up 30 percent of the pollution (orfonline.org).

Recently, the Indian government has been taking steps towards fixing these issues. In

2017, they banned the use of petcoke and petroleum in factories (orfonline.org), and there has

been a push for electric vehicles (brookings.edu). However, if only the government, and not the

residents, works on stopping urban air pollution, New Delhi might stay polluted forever. New

Delhi needs its citizens to take action, but too many of them are more worried about what they

are going to eat for dinner to be concerned about air pollution (nytimes.com). About 10 percent

of New Delhi's population lives in the slums (wws.princeton.edu), where they are exposed to

more air pollution than if they lived in a house (nytimes.com). While most people don't have the

power to make the Indian government help in the slums, we do have the power to donate money

to an organization that will help in the slums. One organization, Voice of Slum, helps by raising

money for kids in the slums so that they can go to school. Having an education is important. If

you have an education it's easier to get a well-paying job, and therefore helps get you out of

poverty. Another one of Voice of Slum's current projects is to help children in the slums get

enough to eat. If all the people that call the slums home have enough money to meet their basic

needs, they won't have to worry about food and can focus on improving the air quality of their

city. By donating money to places like Voice of Slum, we're one step closer to reaching our goal

of sustainable cities. Another thing you can do is write a letter to your government. You could

ask your friends to write letters, too, because the more letters there are the more attention there

will be drawn to the cause. For inspiration you could go to Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

EDF has petitions related to air pollution. One of them is actually about electric vehicles! If we do all these things, it will gradually bring the total pollution level down until it's low enough that it won't be a threat.

Now, imagine that you are sitting on the front steps of your house playing a board game with your sister. The blue sky is clear, and you can see the cotton candy-like clouds drifting slowly. You see an airplane pass overhead, and for a brief moment you wonder if it's the plane your cousin is arriving on later that day. Your pondering is interrupted, though, because your mother is yelling at you. "Put the game away, it's time for you to head to school!" You and your sister haphazardly shove all the tokens into the box and messily throw the board on top of it, shoving it through the door before grabbing your backpacks and getting on your bikes to head to school. All of this happened while breathing clean, unpolluted air. Scenes like this could truly happen in places like New Delhi if we tried hard enough to get rid of air pollution. Millions of people wouldn't have to die every year (time.com), and you wouldn't have to worry about stepping outside and barely being able to see the cars in front of you. So, what do you think? Would you rather live in a dirty, polluted world for the rest of your life? Or would you rather live in a clean, healthy environment? Everyone has their own opinions, but I have my fingers crossed that you will pick the one that is healthier for you and everyone else.

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