



Global Warming



If you watch television, you surely have heard the warnings about global warming. Opinions vary from extreme worry to complete denial. Who is right? What is happening to our planet, and just how seriously will global warming endanger it? These issues must be addressed and explored immediately in order to come up with viable solutions. The question is how?

Definition

Global warming is the gradual increase of the earth's average temperature. It has increased by about 0.5°C over the past 100 years. You may ask, "What's the big deal?" So far, the weather has shown the most obvious effects. However, environmentalists and scientists are starting to notice other worrisome changes. For example, the polar ice caps and glaciers are melting faster than usual. This causes feeding problems for polar bears and breeding problems for seals and penguins. The warming of the oceans is causing more frequent and severe storms like hurricanes. Weather patterns are also affected. Some regions receive too much rain and snow, while others do not receive enough, causing droughts.

Causes

The main cause of global warming is an increase in greenhouse gases. This is brought about by the burning of fossil fuels. We do this when we heat our homes, drive our cars or run machinery. Greenhouse gases are important to keep another ice age at bay by trapping some of the heat from the sun. However, too many greenhouse gases cause the average temperature on Earth to rise.

Impact

Many scientists, including world-famous David Suzuki, have been warning us of the severe consequences of global warming. Even a rise by another 0.5°C could cause the polar ice caps to melt away completely. This would bring a major rise in ocean levels and severe flooding near the coasts.

Additional consequences could include extreme heat waves, drastic shifts in animal populations, critical weather fluctuations and the spread of disease. It would also mean the death of most coral reefs as well as major droughts and forest fires. At the present rate, these changes could happen within the next 50 years or so.

Solutions

Everyone agrees: We need to cut down greenhouse gas emissions by burning less fossil fuels! The problem is how do we do it? Scientists and governments have proposed several plans over the last few years. The most recent is the Kyoto Accord, an international agreement between countries to reduce greenhouse gases. However, the implementation of the accord is extremely costly. This has caused many countries, including Canada, to defer the deadline by several years to meet the goals of this international agreement. Unfortunately, other countries have opted out of the accord completely.

Conclusion

The problem is not going to solve itself or go away! As citizens of the world, we need to stay on top of things. We need to put pressure on our governments for immediate and sustainable solutions. More importantly, we need to change our own attitudes by curbing our love of big, powerful cars, or gas guzzlers, by car pooling or using public transportation, and by turning down the heat and air conditioning. Thinking GREEN more often would be a step in the right direction. What do you think?

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