

**Topic: Environmental Concerns**

**Let's get started...**

Did you separate your trash this week, into “garbage” and “recycling”? Did you “reduce, re-use or recycle” anything this week? Did you have an “emissions” check on your car this year? Did you drink clean water this week? Did you breathe clean air this week?

**Background:**

In the United States, many new federal, state, and municipal laws have been passed in the last 20 years, to protect the environment – the air, water, and land we use. One series of laws in particular, the “Super Fund” statutes, require the clean up of sites contaminated by toxic wastes and hazardous chemicals. Many groups, such as the Sierra Club, have been organized by citizens to lobby for changes in the laws, and to plan environmental cleanups of neighborhoods, parks and community recreation areas. Scientific and political concerns have emerged surrounding the issue of “global warming.” Some groups are concerned about the use of nuclear technology for power. They are worried about radioactive contamination if there is a “spill,” such as happened at Three Mile Island in 1979. Other countries have also had accidental releases of toxic materials, such as Chernobyl in Russia in 1986 and Bhopal in India in 1984.



**In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:**

- When you were a child, where was a place with clean, pure water and clean, fresh air? Do you think this place is the same today? Has it changed? If so, how has it changed? Why has it changed? Are the changes good or bad?
- Do the people and government in your native country worry about protecting the environment?
- Does your native country have laws requiring businesses and citizens to protect the environment, or to clean up any damage to the air, water or land?

**Share your partner's answers with the group.**

**Discussion Questions:**

Which part of the natural environment do you feel is in the most danger? Why do you think this is true?

Air  
Water  
Animals  
Plants and trees  
Global warming

Which of these issues do you feel is most urgent?

What do you think that governments should do to help solve these problems?

What do you think individual people should do about these problems?

Who should pay to correct these problems?

Does your native country have any problems with air or water pollution?

If so, what are some causes of air and water pollution in your country?

What types of laws in your country protect the environment? Give examples.

Have there been any changes in the environment in your country in the last 20 years?

Is the air cleaner or more polluted?

Is the water cleaner or more polluted?

**Challenge Questions:**

Are toxic wastes and hazardous chemical contamination of earth, water, and air a problem in your native country? Talk with a partner from a different country about these problems in your countries.

There have been oil spill accidents in many locations around the world in the past 10-15 years. Tell about any oil spills in the waters in or near your native country. How did your country's government respond to the problem. Tell a partner from another country.

Does your country have any citizen-led environmental groups to raise public awareness?

If so, do any of these groups lobby your native country's government for changes in the laws? Discuss with a partner or small group from different countries.

If yes, tell a partner or small group about this group (or these groups). If there have been changes because of the group's lobbying, tell about the group's actions and the resulting changes. What are similarities and differences among your different countries?

**New words and Idioms:**

Recycle; pollution; hazardous waste; acid rain; global warming; ozone layer; environment; municipal; reduce, reuse, recycle; environment; effluent; sewage; discharge; shred; "neighborhood cleanup;" emissions; emissions check;" garbage; trash; landfill; transfer station; "Super Fund" laws; "wetlands;" lobby; recreational areas; concerns; emerged; contamination; toxic chemicals; citizen-led; raise awareness, spill.