



Pollution



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» Along with climate change and biodiversity loss, the pollution of air, water and soil is one of the major environmental crises of our time.

When ecological boundaries are exceeded, this also has significant health impacts. Despite recent heat waves, droughts, heavy rainfall events and the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers and society still do not take this connection seriously enough.

The multiple environmental crises require profound change. Policymakers and society need to rethink approaches to these issues and recognise how strongly human health and the environment are interconnected.

[*SRU German Advisory Council on the Environment. For a Systematic Integration of Environment and Health. Summary 2023. PDF*](#)

» Ambient air pollution, chemical pollution, and soil pollution - the forms of pollution produced by industry, mining, electricity generation, mechanised agriculture, and petroleum-powered vehicles - are all on the rise.

In the most severely affected countries, pollution-related disease is responsible for more than one death in four.

Like climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, desertification, and depletion of the world's fresh water supply, pollution endangers the stability of the Earth's support systems and threatens the continuing survival of human societies.



Pollution is now a substantial problem that endangers the health of billions, degrades the Earth's ecosystems, undermines the economic security of nations, and is responsible for an enormous global burden of disease, disability, and premature death.

Philip J. Landrigan et al. The Lancet Commission on pollution and health. www.thelancet.com Vol. 391 February 3, 2018

» Water quality will continue to decline in the future if the discharge of inadequately treated wastewater – currently about 80 % of the world's wastewater – and with it pathogens, persistent chemicals, nutrients and solid waste continues.

[WBGU. German Advisory Council on Global Change. Water in heated world. Summary. 2024. PDF](#)

» According to a new study, it is estimated that over four billion people worldwide do not have an adequate supply of drinking water. That is more than half of the world's population.

Esther E. Greenwood et al. Mapping safe drinking water use in low- and middle-income countries. Science 15. Aug 2024. Vol 385, Issue 6710 pp. 784 - 790



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» The political silence on one of the most worrying findings of current climate impact research is astonishing. This is the question of how progressive climate change will affect human health and whether the corresponding changes in environmental conditions could even make certain regions of the world uninhabitable.

Translated from: Hans Joachim Schellnhuber. Kurze wissenschaftliche Stellungnahme zur sich verschärfenden Klimakrise. WissenLeben 14.02.25

» Because the increasing environmental and health problems often have common roots, synergies can be found in approaches to solving them. We are at a crossroads.

[Planetary Health: What we need to talk about. German Advisory Council on Global Change \(WBGU\). 2021. PDF](#)

» Climate change, biodiversity loss and global pollution must be halted in order to maintain the health of people and the planet.

Important, hitherto neglected starting points include stopping the exploration of fossil energy sources and strengthening the biosphere on land, in freshwater and in the sea - also to prevent zoonotic*) pandemics.

*) Zoonoses are infectious diseases which can be reciprocally transmitted between animals and humans. As a



result of rapid population growth, increasing mobility, changed animal breeding and husbandry as well as climatic changes, zoonoses become increasingly significant (according to BfR German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment).

Health and environmental risks from emissions and the dumping of persistent wastes and chemicals in the air, soil and water should be prevented with a *controlled circular economy and emissions regulations*.

[German Advisory Council on Global Change WBGU. Factsheet No. 8. 2023. Healthy Living. PDF](#)

