

## 9. Air

We all breathe the air around us to live. Breathing is essential to our lives. If we don't breathe good air, we die, often in misery. Breathing is so important, we do it unconsciously, even when we are asleep. Breathing is as important as a heartbeat. It doesn't matter who we are, what our position in society is, or how much money or power we have, we have to breathe good air, or we die or get sick and suffer.

Yet, we pollute our air with poisons, threatening our lives and those of most living beings around us.<sup>1</sup> 95% of the human population breathes unsafe air.<sup>2</sup> Air pollution is the 3<sup>rd</sup>-largest human health threat, behind high blood pressure and dietary risks, about tied with tobacco deaths, which are getting lower.<sup>3</sup> The number of deaths due to ambient air pollution is on track to increase by more than 50% by 2050.<sup>4</sup> 6.5 million deaths worldwide were from air pollution-related diseases in 2012, 12% of all global deaths, more than numbers of people killed by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and road injuries combined.<sup>5</sup>

Air pollution becomes water and land pollution, as pollution in air settles in waters and on land. All of that harms life. It is contributing to the genocide of a million species of life.<sup>6</sup> Is there any way to perceive that other than as ignorant, neglectful and stupid? We do it, because other values interfere with the value of clean air, primarily greed in making money, and because we do not force polluters to bear the costs of the harms created by their pollution. If polluters had to pay for the healthcare and lost productivity of all they harm, they would likely fail as businesses. We don't make them do that, because of ignorance and the power they exert to prevent us from doing that.

As with clean, good energy food and water, clean, good energy air is essential to life and well-being, and we need to value it accordingly. Stop polluting the air!

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<sup>1</sup> See the subsection on Air Pollution in the *We Can Change Our Wicked Problems!* Chapter on Pollution and Other Environmental Harms, <https://www.wecanchange.us/pollution-and-other-environmental-h>

<sup>2</sup> "More than 95% of world's population breathe dangerous air, major study finds", Fiona Harvey, April 17, 2018, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/apr/17/more-than-95-of-worlds-population-breathe-dangerous-air-major-study-finds>

<sup>3</sup> "WHO Director: Air Pollution Is the 'New Tobacco'", Kristin Houser, Futurism, October 29, 2018, <https://wordpress.futurism.com/air-pollution-new-tobacco/>

<sup>4</sup> "Pollution is killing more people than wars, obesity, smoking, and malnutrition" Hilary Brueck, October 24, 2017, Business Insider, <http://www.businessinsider.com/pollution-kills-more-people-than-wars-obesity-smoking-malnutrition-2017-10>

<sup>5</sup> "7 shocking facts about air pollution", Rosamond Hutt and Keith Breene, October 27, 2016, World Economic Forum, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/air-pollution-the-true-cost-in-numbers/>

<sup>6</sup> "One million species face extinction, U.N. report says. And humans will suffer as a result.", Darryl Fears, The Washington Post, May 6, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2019/05/06/one-million-species-face-extinction-un-panel-says-humans-will-suffer-result/?utm\\_term=.d76b28245264](https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2019/05/06/one-million-species-face-extinction-un-panel-says-humans-will-suffer-result/?utm_term=.d76b28245264)