

# Americas choice: environmental myopia or long-term thinking

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## America's Choice: Environmental Myopia or Long-Term Thinking Recently

America faced a series of disasters: Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne, incredible damages caused by Katrina in New Orleans, and panic provoked by Rita in Texas. The calamities have always triggered environmental concerns but nowadays the issues of human influence on ecosystem are of extreme importance.

In her article " Don't Mess with Mother" Anna Quindlen analyzes some of the causes and effects of the recent catastrophes and emphasizes: " It's about changing the way we all live now." She means that we should rethink and change the way the natural resources are consumed in order to maintain the environmental equilibrium and secure the future. " Consumption used to be the name for a mortal wasting disease" - Anna says - and yesterday's carelessness has brought it first results already. If nothing changes humanity will be put under threat of ecological disasters and possibility to run out of resources. I strongly agree with Anna Quindlen.

In US majority of population has a least one car, and some have more than one. The number of vehicles has never been bigger than today. While in 1950 there were only 0. 3 million vehicles, today the Americans have more than 25 million vehicles. We're living a life of leisure and excess. In the short term it seems great for America, but in the long term it leads to air pollution, and causes serious problems. Vehicular emission (carbon monoxide, particulate matter, hydrocarbons and oxides of nitrogen) contributes greatly to the rising levels of all major pollutants. Altogether, humans produce twice as much of the greenhouse gas as our planet's ecosystem can absorb. It should be an issue of prime concern because the emissions are from ground

level sources and thus have the greatest impact on the health of the population exposed to it. Air pollutants put citizens at great health risk. To inhibit the process, we should take actions now and work towards a better tomorrow by using public transport system, controlling the number of vehicles, and restraining per unit emission levels. These are not big lifestyle changes, but their successful implementation will lower pollution.

Let us take a look at another vivid example. Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs) have become an important part of the daily lives of many persons in the United States. SUVs are comfortable, but their extensive usage leads to higher levels of energy consumption. Having only about 6 percent of the world's population, the USA is already consuming a quarter of the world's oil. Recently energy in America became more expensive than it had been for the last few decades, and lack of energy resources is a probable ultimate result of the current consumers' preferences.

In addition, American wasting disease is unbelievable. According to Dr. Jane Rissler, a member of the Food and Environment Program, daily Americans throw out 200, 000 tons of edible food and eat excessive 200 billion (enough to feed 80 million people) calories per day. Besides, average individual daily consumption of water is 159 gallons, while for more than half the world's population lives this figure equals to 25 gallons.

We consume more natural resources than the earth can produce. Therefore, the consumption levels should be changed to correspond to the " production capacities" of the nature. Possible measures are SUVs hybrid gas-electric or smaller cars to save energy; rational use of food and water etc.

Having faulty understanding of the fundamental American value, which is

freedom, some critics claim that they have right to do whatever they want with their privately owned land. Ignoring the prospect effects, they use the precious land for things like tobacco, tea, coffee, wasteful damn projects, or clear the territory. Nevertheless, they don't realize that when the best agricultural land is used up as described above, more marginal land has to be used for food and subsistence farming, which may require clearing more rainforest, or other forms of encroachment on other ecosystems. As a result, the natural disasters become more dangerous. No surprise that Katrina kills more than fourteenth thousands people and seriously affects thousands more who survive. Therefore, the agricultural areas should be delineated; building projects - reviewed for potential harmful effects; and rainforest and wild territories - protected because the land is vital for the survival and prosperity of human species.

To draw a conclusion, humans depend on their "mother" and on the natural resources to survive. Through our activities each of us, people, and we together do interact with natural environment. Only through the efforts of scientists, business leaders, legislators, and individuals we can reduce the amount of natural resources' overuse on the planet. This challenge must be met by all of us in order to assure that a healthy environment, wealthy of natural resources, will exist for ourselves and our children. Therefore, I agree with Anna Quindlen that we should change the way we all live now!