

Forest Family Forever!

Facts about Oil

Many products that we use every day—including gasoline, styrofoam, and plastic—are made from oil. The oil used to make these products often comes from beneath the ground in the rainforests. Removing the oil from the ground, or *drilling* for oil, is very harmful to the rainforest. In fact, drilling for oil is one of the main causes of rainforest destruction worldwide.

Oil, or *petroleum*, comes from the fossils of dinosaurs and plants that lived on Earth millions of years ago. Oil is often used to make fuels, called *fossil fuels*, including gasoline. Oil is also used to make plastic bags, bottles, and cups, styrofoam, synthetic fabrics like polyester and nylon, and even carpet.

Large oil companies drill for oil on millions of acres of rainforest. The companies then sell the oil in order to make money. There is nothing wrong with making money, but when companies destroy the rainforests to make money they destroy not only the forest, but also the lives of the animals and people who live in the rainforest.

Oil drilling harms the rainforests because trees are cut down to make room for oil roads, oil pipelines, and oil machinery. In some places,

people then move in along the roads and cut down even more trees. When trees are destroyed, all the animals that lived in those trees are homeless. Without their forest home, many animal species face *extinction*, which means they could disappear forever like the dinosaurs.

Another problem is that when companies drill for oil, the oil is often spilled onto the soil and into rivers. *Indigenous peoples*—people whose families have lived in the rainforest for thousands of years—often become sick from the pollution. Sometimes indigenous peoples are pushed off of their lands, or *displaced*, by oil projects.

Oil also creates air pollution once it's turned into gasoline. Burning fossil fuels like gasoline (by driving a car, for example) makes our air dirty and unhealthy to breathe. Some people get sick from breathing too much of this *smog* or dirty air.

Burning oil and gasoline also makes the planet get warmer. This *global warming* creates *climate change*. This means that weather patterns around the world start to change in dangerous ways. Winters become colder, summers become hotter, and storms become fiercer and more frequent. These changes in climate are hard on the forests. One third of the world's forests are threatened by climate change.

Oil Is Not Necessary

Even though we currently use oil and oil products to drive our cars, fly our planes, operate our factories, and warm our homes,



we don't have to use oil for these things. Instead, we can use renewable sources of energy, like the sun and the wind. Energy from the sun and the wind is called *renewable energy* because it never runs out. Light and heat from the sun can be used to make *solar power* and windmills can be used to capture the power of the wind. The sun and the wind are great sources of energy because they don't harm the rainforests or pollute the planet!

We can also use things other than oil to make plastic, such as corn or the hemp plant. Since corn and hemp can be grown on farmland that has already been cleared for other crops, growing them does not harm the rainforests.

What Can We Do to Help?

Until our energy supply comes from renewable energies like the sun and the wind, many of us will need to use oil in our daily lives. By reducing the amount of oil we use, however, we can help save the rainforests. There are many ways we can reduce the amount of oil we use.

First, instead of driving our cars, we can walk, ride our bikes, carpool, and take the bus, train, or subway whenever possible. We can also write to automobile companies asking them to make cars that run on alternative fuels that do not come from oil.

Second, we can use energy from the sun as much as possible. We can hang our laundry outside to dry, warm up special bags of water for fun solar showers, and ask our parents to install solar heating panels. Although solar panels may be expensive to buy, over time they'll save a lot of money—and they'll help save the rainforests!

Third, we can use less plastic by using glass, ceramic, metal, and cloth instead. Take a cloth bag with you to the market and use it

instead of using a plastic grocery bag. Use a glass or a ceramic mug to drink from instead of plastic cups, and buy drinks in glass bottles instead of plastic bottles. If you do use plastic containers, make sure to reuse them as much as possible before recycling them.

Fourth, we can wear clothing that is made from natural fibers like cotton, hemp, or silk instead of from petroleum-based synthetic fibers like nylon, polyester, and acetate.

Fifth, we can speak out and let oil companies know how we feel. We can ask them to provide clean, renewable energy that comes from alternatives like the sun and wind. We can ask them to please stop exploring for oil in the rainforests, and tell them that we treasure the rainforests and all the animals and people that live there. We can let them know we care!

