

## NATURE ENVIRONMENT

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## SOS – Earth Calling!

The Earth as we know it is in a state of flux. Causes of this transformation stem from human behavior; the consequences pose a threat to the environment as a whole, to the diversity of plant and animal life, and ultimately, to humankind itself.

Global warming, a process advanced by pollution and land degradation, is setting a destructive, self-accelerating chain of climatic events in motion – resulting in more frequent natural disasters. More and more fertile farmland is being lost the world over. Some argue that genetically manipulated organisms can help solve the problems, but the consequences of releasing such organisms into the environment are not known.

**SOS – Earth Calling!** Many people are hearing this cry for help and realizing that Earth is not simply a planet, but the basis for our existence. The world won't rethink its response to global warming overnight. But local projects give rise to the hope that at least some of the consequences of our blind exploitation of the Earth can be mitigated.

### 01 Losing Ground – When Fields Turn to Desert

Rapid worldwide desertification is one of the biggest environmental problems facing our planet. 250 million people in 110 countries are threatened by this process of degradation, which is jeopardizing food supplies for one sixth of the world's population. A variety of projects show that something can be done to reduce the advancing devastation.

### 02 Ecocide – Canada's Oil Sands

Canada holds the world's second largest oil reserves. But that oil lies hidden in layers of sand up to 70 meters below the surface. In order to extract it, gigantic wounds are being torn in the untouched Canadian wilderness. The process is having a catastrophic effect on the environment and on people living in the region.

### 03 Plastic Waste – The Imperishable Problem

Most synthetic materials in daily use are virtually non-biodegradable and over time emit hormonally disruptive additives into the atmosphere. Scattered by wind, water or illegal garbage dumping, these materials are in evidence throughout the globe, even in ocean regions far from any civilization. Recycling is the only solution to the problem.

### 04 Genetic Contamination – Unchecked Technology

Since the 1980s, genetic engineering was viewed as the cure-all for the agricultural sector. But today it appears clear that its advantages benefit industry rather than farmers, and that its risks have not been properly assessed. Independent studies of the impact of genetically modified crops or organisms are thin on the ground.

### 05 Coal Seam Fires – The Smoldering Poison

Huge subterranean fires are raging in the coal belts of China. The fires are often caused by incorrect and illegal mining practices. The seam fires ignite upon contact with air and can smolder for decades. Vast amounts of toxic substances are released, and valuable resources destroyed.

### 06 Climate Change – The Big Melt

The Earth is getting warmer. Climate change is most evident in three key regions. In Greenland, average temperatures have risen by five degrees Celsius. In the Peruvian Andes, ancient glaciers are melting. In Bangladesh, saltwater from rising seas is infiltrating inland regions via the tributaries of the Ganges and is rendering coastal areas infertile.