Degree of Impact Cards

Degree of Impact: Energy

Americans constitute less than 5% of the world's population, but are responsible for nearly 20% of the world's annual energy consumption, including one-quarter of fossil fuels.

On average, one American consumes as much energy as:

- 2 French
- 11 Indians
- 24 Ghanaians
- 82 Afghans
- 329 Somalis

Source: Our World in Data (2021), American Geosciences Institute (2017)

Degree of Impact: Waste

The more we consume, the more waste we produce. Despite only accounting for 16% of the world population, high-income countries like the U.S. are responsible for 34% of the world's waste.

The average American generates 4.9 pounds of garbage each day. Meanwhile, the average person worldwide generates 1.6 pounds of waste per day.

Source: World Bank

Degree of Impact: Global Warming

In 2020, the United States was responsible for 13.5% of the world's carbon dioxide emissions.

China, with over four times more people than the U.S., now produces more total carbon dioxide, but the U.S. leads in per capita emissions by nearly double the Chinese statistic.

Carbon dioxide is the primary greenhouse gas responsible for global warming.

Source: Our World in Data (2022)

Degree of Impact: Water Use

The average American consumes four times as much water in one day as the average person in Bangladesh. While some countries use water excessively, almost two-thirds of the world experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year.

Global water demand is projected to increase by 20-30% by 2050, but the supply of clean, accessible water continues to be reduced by pollution and climate change.

Source: Water Footprint Network (2017), UNESCO (2019)

Degree of Impact: Ecological Footprint

Our "ecological footprint" is a measure of how fast we consume resources and generate waste compared to how fast nature can absorb our waste and generate new resources. Since the 1970s, our demand for resources has exceeded what the Earth can regenerate in a year. It now takes 1.5 years to regenerate what we use in one year. That means we're borrowing from future generations and not using resources sustainably.

If everyone consumed as Americans do, we'd need the resources of over 5 Earths to sustain us.

Source: Global Footprint Network, Earth Overshoot Day

Degree of Impact: Land Use

Topsoil: Around the world, soil is being swept away 10-40 times faster than it is being replenished, destroying cropland the size of Indiana every year. 90% of the Earth's topsoil is projected to be at-risk by 2050.

Forests: The world has already lost one-third of its natural forest due to agriculture, ranching, mining, logging and climate change. In the last 100 years, the world has lost as much forest as it did in the previous 9,000 years.

Source: UN FAO (2022), Our World in Data (2022)