

Happy Earth Day

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

Simple steps to protect the environment

Protecting the environment is a goal that everyone can help to accomplish. The greatest threats to the planet are primarily driven by human activity. Climate change, habitat loss and biodiversity loss are notable challenges of the environmental crisis, says the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Although it may seem like major overhauls are needed to protect the planet, small, consistent changes in how people behave also can have a lasting impact.

The following are some simple steps to effect environmental change.

- Eat more plants. Choosing plant-based proteins like beans, lentils and nuts in place of red meat a few nights per week can have an impact on land and water use required for raising livestock.
- Plan meals. Planning meals can help to greatly reduce food waste. Stanford University reports that 40 percent of edible food in the United States is wasted. Planning meals and using leftovers creatively can keep excess waste out of landfills.
- Rely on LED lights. LED bulbs last longer than traditional incandescent bulbs. LEDs also consume 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs.
- Adjust the thermostat. Keeping a home comfortable is a benefit of modern living. The National Park Service says simply adjusting the thermostat by 3 F down in the winter and up in the summer can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 1,000 to 1,050 pounds per year.
- Unplug appliances. Unplug “vampire” appliances when they are not in use. Such appliances are those that draw power even when they’re not being used. Televisions, chargers and others are known culprits. A power strip can be used to cut off power completely when not in use.
- Buy secondhand items. Whenever possible, shop secondhand for clothes and furniture. Used items reduce demand for new manufacturing, which tends to be energy-intensive.



- Rely on public transportation. Riding buses and trains is a more energy-efficient way to get around than driving solo. Whenever possible, carpool or hop on public transportation to reduce fuel consumption.
 - Shop local and seasonal items. Patronizing local shops and locally sourced goods helps reduce how many miles items need to be transported. The further products must travel to get into your hands, the greater the transportation emissions produced.
- Although protecting the environment seems like a monumental task, small steps anyone can embrace can have a big impact. TF264802

The effects of trash on the environment



away across the globe every year. That trash subsequently enters the environment and affects the climate and the health of animals and humans. And some research suggests that the effects of trash on the environment might be underestimated.

A 2024 study from researchers at Harvard University’s John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences noted that estimates from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indicating methane emissions from landfills have been greatly underestimated. Researchers behind the Harvard study found that methane emissions from landfills are 51 percent higher than EPA estimates suggest. That’s a notable miscalculation, as methane emissions are a significant contributor to climate change. In fact, EarthDay.org notes that methane has a warming potential more than 80 times greater than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. The warming potential of methane underscores the need to incorporate waste management practices that may help reduce methane emissions into any strategies designed to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Trash also can have a harmful effect on wildlife. Trash can get into natural settings, including waterways, where it has an adverse effect on marine species. EarthDay.org notes that plastic or solid waste gradually degrades into smaller pieces, making it difficult for wildlife, including marine species, to distinguish between what is food they can eat and what is plastic that they should avoid. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, as much as 23 million tons of plastic enters aquatic environments each year.

Trash also can have an adverse effect on human health. Thousands of chemicals are utilized to manufacture products that ultimately end up in landfills each year, and EarthDay.org notes that landfills provide a pathway for those chemicals to enter the environment. Some of those chemicals are endocrine-disrupting and/or carcinogenic, and exposure to them may increase a person’s risk for health issues including infertility, cancer and Alzheimer’s disease, among others.

Trash is a part of daily life. Recognition of the harmful environmental impact trash can have is vital as the world looks to alter behaviors that could be jeopardizing the health of the planet and the species on it. TF264803

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April 22, 2026
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