

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN™

Permanent Address: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode/poisoned-poor-killed-in-millions-by-pollution/>
Energy & Sustainability » 60-Second Earth



Poisoned Poor Killed in Millions by Pollution

The Global Alliance on Health and Pollution calls for a war against pollution to save the lives of more than eight million people annually. David Biello reports

Jun 15, 2014 | By David Biello |

What kills more people than HIV, malaria and tuberculosis every year? Air pollution. Tack on fouled water and poisoning by toxic waste and pollution killed 8.4 million people in 2012—or nearly three times as many people as those three diseases. Combined.

That's according to a new analysis by the [Global Alliance on Health and Pollution](#) based on data collected by the World Health Organization.

The problem is people breathing in the [fumes of cooking fires](#) in smoky homes or the soot from [coal-fired power plants](#) outside. Or there's the suffering caused by raw sewage in the water supply or poisonous heavy metals that get [into the soil via industrial waste](#).

That's why the Alliance is [calling for a global battle](#) to help the poisoned poor via the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) currently being formulated by the United Nations. The proposed goal would be to at minimum cut such [pollution-related deaths](#) to less than three million people per year by 2030.

ADVERTISEMENT




The rich [pollution](#) already exist and have been used for years to clean up the air and water in the [one](#) to transfer that technology where it can [save even more lives](#).

—D

[Th

Cor

Oldest newest



Get the latest special collector's edition, Dinosaurs!

Limited Time Offer!

[Purchase Now >](#)

ElmerB

June 15, 2014, 10:17 AM

There are some smart people who write for Scientific American. Odd that they fail to mention reducing pollution would help alleviate the problem. No money to be made in green practices or conservation, I suppose.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

jrkipling

June 15, 2014, 4:02 PM

We are all in favor of fewer people dying from pollution. We all want improved living conditions for impoverished human beings. The technology is not being withheld. A few things need to happen to enable the technology transfer.

Not necessarily in order of priority:

1. Money to purchase, install, and maintain the technology.
2. Rule law to keep item 1. from being stolen.
3. Sufficient economic development to sustain 1 & 2.

Representative government seems a big plus for the above. Would that it were as simple as technology transfer.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

jrkipling → **jrkipling**

June 15, 2014, 4:14 PM

Rule of law

I wish the Alliance every success. I'm not hopeful it can solve the underlying problems.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

Chryses

June 15, 2014, 10:01 PM

So maybe it's time to transfer that technology where it can save even more lives.

Assuming that the technology has not yet been deployed to where it can save even more lives, I wonder what has prevented that from happening.

Poverty is the proximate cause, I suppose.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

Chryses

June 16, 2014, 5:36 AM

Interesting. A straightforward reading of your post suggests that poverty, while apparently a contributing factor, may not be the principle constraint.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

jrkipling → **Chryses**

June 16, 2014, 9:48 AM

Yes, it is absolutely time to transfer the technology. Actually doing it is a bit more complicated. One of my relatives went to Africa with a church group to distribute portable water purification filters and demonstrate how to use them. I couldn't help wondering how many more filters they could have sent for the cost of their travel, but that's just me. The best I could understand from the description of the devices, they were likely gravity microbial filters.

A few weeks later when someone from one of their churches in-country when back to the village to check on the progress of their good works, every filter was missing or damaged beyond use. Now this is just one anecdotal example. Maybe the Alliance has more effective strategies to accomplish technology transfer? Like I said before, I hope they can make a difference.

[Report as Abuse](#) | [Link to This](#)

You must [sign in](#) or [register](#) as a ScientificAmerican.com member to submit a comment.

TRY A RISK-FREE ISSUE

The image shows the cover of Scientific American magazine. The title 'SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN' is at the top. Below it, the main headline reads 'A CRISIS IN PHYSICS?' in large, bold, white letters on a dark background. There is a small graphic element to the left of the headline.

YES! Send me a free issue of Scientific American with no obligation to continue the subscription. If I like it, I will be billed for the one-year subscription.

[Subscribe Now](#)

Scientific American is a trademark of Scientific American, Inc., used with permission

© 2014 Scientific American, a Division of Nature America, Inc.

All Rights Reserved.