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[CURRENT ISSUE](#)
[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)



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EARTHTALK FOR YOUNG READERS

Week of 12/12/2004

From Stacy Clark, Youth Editor of E/The Environmental Magazine

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Dear EarthTalk, Young Readers: Why do we need to conserve resources?

—Wynne H., St. Louis, MO

Hi, Wynne!

When I was a young girl, I never stopped to think about where our energy sources came from. I just turned on the lights or turned up the heat and pretty much took them both for granted! Silly me! Now I know that the energy I was using came from "fossil fuels," created underground over 65 million years ago from the fossils, or remains, of ancient plants and animals.

These underground sources of energy (which include oil, coal and natural gas) are not renewable, which means that when they are used up, they'll be gone for good. It has been estimated that the world's supply of fossil fuels may only last another 20 to 50 years. So, during that time, we'll need to find new sources of energy that we can rely on in the future. While we are busy developing new kinds of energy to replace fossil fuels, there's a lot we can do to make what we have last longer. Basically, we just need to use less energy or use our own energy! Here are a few ideas that really can make a difference!

Walk. Skip. Jump. Run. Snowboard. Surf. Skate. Sail. Ski. Swim. Rollerblade. Climb.

The point is, whenever you can, try to find alternatives to driving in a car. You'll be conserving resources, reducing pollution and looking cool doing it!

You can also reuse things, recycle, turn off the lights when you're not using them and ask your family to switch to electricity produced from renewable resources. In America, there are wind energy projects operating or planned in 28 states. Check out the American Wind Energy Association to find out if wind power facilities are located near your family: <http://www.awea.org/projects/index.html>



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 action!**
 *Something is fishy
 Mercury is a toxic
 contaminant that is
 showing up in
 dangerously high
 concentrations in the
 fish we eat, yet the
 FDA isn't protecting
 us!? **Take action!**

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Dear EarthTalk, Young Readers: My dad keeps telling me not to waste water. He makes it sound like we could actually run out some day. Could we? Isn't there plenty of water to go around?

—Gillian B., Seattle, WA

Gillian, I'm sure you're not the only person living in Seattle who has a hard time understanding why conserving water is so important. After all, it rains more than 200 days a year in Seattle!

But your dad makes a good point when you consider the bigger picture.

Less than one percent of all the water in the world is available as fresh water that we can use! This one percent breaks down to water stored in soil and rocks underground (groundwater), and water stored in lakes, rivers, and streams (surface water). Whether we drill wells to pump groundwater or build reservoirs to contain surface water, the amount of water available at any given time remains fairly constant.

But with world population growing each year, the demand for fresh water is growing too. So, the water we do have will have to be shared by even more users. And it's not just more people who will have to share—it's agriculture and manufacturing too! In the United States, for example, agricultural production alone uses up 42 percent! Wow! That's almost half our available fresh water supply! Electrical power production (the non-renewable kind) consumes 39 percent. Our homes, offices and hotels require 11 percent, and eight percent is used in all other types of manufacturing and mining.

So, when you think about it, there really isn't any water to waste!

And, with so many increasing demands on our water, we need to remember too that fresh water is not spread evenly around the planet. Some places have enough available fresh water to go around, while other areas have almost none. So conserving water is a really good habit to get into—no matter where we live—because what we save, someone else may be able to use.

GOT AN ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTION? Send it to: EARTH TALK for YOUNG READERS, c/o E/The Environmental Magazine, P.O. Box 5098, Westport, CT 06881; submit your question at: www.emagazine.com; or e-mail us at: stacy@emagazine.com.

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