

What Are Natural Resources?

Everything Comes from the Earth!



Do you love chewing bubble gum? Do you enjoy hula or playing baseball? Did you know that all of these things, from bubble gum machines to the stitching on a baseball come from the earth? In fact, everything we use comes from something originally found in nature! We call these things **natural resources**. Natural resources come from nature and are used or turned into the things that we want and need to live.

What Do Natural Resources Give Us?

From the ancient pyramids of Egypt to rockets in space, everything human beings have ever made or used comes from natural resources. The earth's soil, sunlight, and water grow the plants that give us the food we eat. The heat that keeps our homes warm in the winter comes mostly from oil and coal. The metals that we use to make computers and cans come from minerals found in the earth's crust.

Natural resources provide us with the things we need, such as air, water, and food, as well as things we may want, such as television, toys, and soda.

Where Do We Find Natural Resources?

Although natural resources come from the earth, they are not always found right where we need them. Very often, natural resources come from faraway places before they end up in our home or city.

For instance, a lot of the trees we use for making paper come from the Southeastern forests of the United States. **Petroleum** or oil comes from deep underground, in places like the Middle East, and from underneath the ocean floor. Aluminum comes from a mineral called **bauxite**, which is found in the tropical rainforests of South America and other parts of the world. Even the food we eat often travels thousands of miles before it ever reaches our plates.

Aluminum Cans and Toucans

Besides providing humans with natural resources that we need and want, the earth also provides **habitat**, or homes, for animals. Very often, while trying to get natural resources like trees, oil or minerals, humans destroy animal habitat. Let's look at bauxite, for example. Since this mineral has to be **mined**, or taken out of the ground, from areas like the rainforest, trees and other plants in the forest must first be cut down. These trees and plants provide food and create natural habitat for animals like the jaguar, the spider monkey, and the toucan. Without their rainforest habitat, these animals can't survive.

Will Natural Resources Last Forever?

Although we may have everything we need now, there are many natural resources that won't be around forever. **Renewable** resources are natural resources that will continue to **replenish** themselves, usually by reproducing or growing again. Plants and sunlight are examples of resources that are renewable. **Non-renewable** resources, however, cannot grow back once

they have been used up, and the earth will not make more for us to use. Oil and other minerals like bauxite and gold are examples of non-renewable resources.

Stop Waste!

Even though some natural resources are renewable, we must use them carefully, so we don't run out. Sometimes the natural resource cannot replenish, or refill itself as fast as humans are **consuming** or using it. Fresh water is an example of a renewable resource that we need to use carefully. Although over time, fresh water can replenish itself through the water cycle, we are actually using up our fresh water supplies faster than it's being replenished. During times of **drought** or very little rainfall, if water is used up too quickly it can leave some people without any water at all.

What's in a Bottle?

It takes a lot of natural resources to make the simple things we use every day. For example, plastic bottles are made from oil or petroleum. Most of the petroleum used in the United States comes from far away countries. In order to get the materials needed to make a plastic bottle, companies have to use natural resources to travel to the country, build the equipment needed to drill and remove the oil from the ground, send it back to the factory and finally make a bottle out of it. Once the bottle is made, more natural resources are needed to ship the bottle from the factory to our store shelves. As you can see, this all takes a lot of work—and a lot of natural resources!

Let's Save Our Natural Resources

There are many ways that we can help save or **conserve** our natural resources. We can be smart about the things we use now, and use renewable resources whenever possible. For instance, the electricity we want does not have to come from oil or coal, which are non-renewable resources. We can use energy from the sun, the wind, and even the ocean tides to heat our homes and power our cities. These sources of **renewable energy** don't create pollution and they will never run out!

We can also look for **alternatives**, or different natural resources, to use. This can give us the things we need without using up too much of one kind of natural resource. For instance, we can actually make **tree-free** paper from plants besides trees, such as bamboo and hemp, and even old blue jeans!

Reduce First!

The most important thing we can do to protect nature and conserve resources is to use less stuff! When we **reduce** the amount of stuff we buy or use, we help conserve resources in the first place. When we **reuse** something over and over again, we give that item a longer life of use before it has to be recycled or thrown away. And when we **recycle** things like paper, bottles or metal, we turn something old into something new, which keeps us from having to use more natural resources to make new things.

We must respect the things we get from our planet and realize that by conserving natural resources and protecting nature, that we are protecting our future and the future of all living things!