Air pollution consists of gases, solid particles and aerosols that change the natural composition of the atmosphere. Air pollution is harmful to human health and also can harm pets and wildlife.

**Effects of air pollution on the environment**

Air pollution causes the formation of acid rain, which raises pH (a measure of acidity) in rivers and streams and destroys plants and trees.

Hazy smog attributed to sources as far away as Chicago as well as nearby Atlanta affects north Georgia’s mountainous terrain, resulting in an 80% visibility loss in the summer and a 40% visibility loss in winter.

Air pollution can affect wildlife indirectly by changing plant communities. Atmospheric ozone can stunt growth in various plant species and these changes affect the quality of habitat and food sources of many animals.

**Pets**

Studies show that household pets suffer an increased risk of tumors when exposed to polluted air over an extended period of time. Particulate matter in the air has been linked to cardiac arrest in dogs and veterinarians sometimes attribute pet deaths to the effects of air pollution.

**Amphibians**

Air pollution has been linked to changes in both physiology and behavior in toads and other amphibians. Ozone impairs immune systems in human beings and studies show it affects toads in a similar way.

**Birds**

Birds are affected directly by coal power production exhaust, which can damage birds’ respiratory systems. They also are affected by air pollution indirectly. Increase in wetlands pH causes fish kills, resulting in a decline in the osprey population as sources of food become scarce. Mercury accumulates as it moves through the food chain, becoming very harmful to predatory birds such as the bald eagle.

**Fish**

Acid rain falling in rivers and streams causes pH levels to rise, killing fish that are sensitive to pH fluctuations. Acidic rivers and streams can cause respiratory distress in fish. Acidic water is generally clearer, causing a temperature and light increase in the water, resulting in the relocation of native fish that need a cooler and darker habitat in order to survive.

**Insects**

Insects are very susceptible to air pollution. Small fluctuations in air quality force certain insects to relocate, affecting other plants and animals connected to them. Insects that are more resilient to air pollution are those that digest organic waste less effectively, which can result in a buildup of organic waste when air pollution rises in an area.

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