

EARTH DAY WRITING CONTEST 2012

Topic: Tell us about a pressing environmental issue (i.e: global warming, renewable energy, urban sprawl, etc..) in your city. How would you go about addressing it?

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Class: 10 English

I was watching avidly, and paying my full attention to the ancient village that sat on the far side of a golden sea of ripening rice. I was moving gently forward, to the very view that has always been pulling at my heartstrings. I was touching lightly, and taking a deep sniff of an unknown flower. I was enjoying the fresh morning air filled with the scent of pure paddy grains which was cool like water. Around me, there was nothing but the waves of grains lapping in sphere after sphere of fragrance, the leaves rustling with the mischievous wind, the trees with their twigs vibrating softly.

Somewhere in the distance, I could clearly hear the early crow of a cock, together with the sound of my breath, breaking up the silence. I was listening to the rhythm of all the precious children of Mother Nature. The sun was rising slowly and has begun to illuminate its very first sunrays, ticking sweetly but playfully on my cheek. The early morning was simply beautiful, simply limpid and restful.

And all of a sudden, my eyes snapped open. Everything vanished without trace.

Of course, that didn't really take me by surprise. Nowadays we've witnessed many tranquil sceneries of the countryside gradually turning into urbanized areas, which is called "urban sprawl". Literally, urban sprawl refers to the development of commercial buildings in undeveloped land. In 1990 Vietnam had approximately 500 urban areas and now there are about 760 cities. Urbanized populations have increased by 60 percent during the last 7 years. Concerns over urban sprawl and its effects which influence us in a variety of negative ways have been hotly debated in our country, most notably its environmental issue.

To begin with, urban sprawl can result in the loss of farmland and wildlife habitats. Recently, the government has invested heavily on rural areas in order to create new highways, put up more buildings and skyscrapers, and fringe industrial parks. This leads to a considerable loss of lands, which prevents us from growing plants. Vietnam is an agricultural country; as we are still only a developing country, farming is the most solid base of the economy and it determines primarily our share of GDP.

Therefore, if a myriad of farmlands are destroyed, farmers won't be able to cultivate new crops. Also, urban sprawl can be a contributing factor of the loss of wildlife habitats. People have cut off trees, washed away dense forests, and destroyed meadows and wetlands that were protectors to residential areas. As those lands act as natural sponges for run-offs, flood-prone areas are more likely to suffer from serious damage and fatalities. Take Can Gio rainforest for example. Because many factories have been built there, the need to expand the areas has enabled people to kill trees.

Consequently, whenever there is a tropical low pressure resulted in violent storms, the remaining and fragmented forests can't protect Ho Chi Minh City, causing relentless rains and flooding. It takes several hundred years for a tree to grow fully, and just for one minute the tree is cut down with no regrets at all. Additionally, the survival chances of certain wildlife species are very slim. Several types of animals and plants have gradually disappeared, such as the Tam Dao salamander, the Sumatran rhinoceros, the Ha Tinh langur... As can be seen, urban sprawl has caused so devastating a consequence.

Besides, not only does urban sprawl account to land loss but also induces in air pollution. As urban areas spread out, people started to use more vehicles that can contribute a great plethora of exhaust fumes. Therefore, traffic jams have occurred and fostered air pollution. Moreover, it is the rising of factories in industrial zones that emissions may even be a more acute problem. Imagine bucolic areas in our country would gradually turn into suburbs that can only be just for economic benefits and are so packed with contaminations and traffic congestions, what would you feel? We're rapidly losing the scenic qualities and rustic charms, replaced by such tiring straightened roads, towering buildings preventing us from seeing the clear blue sky and enjoying the cool wind blowing. We must be in high alert since Vietnam has reached a menacing standing of having one of the worst air pollutions in the world. For instance, Thu Duc district, mainly affected by urban sprawl, accelerates the level of emissions. The dust density measured there has surpassed the permissible standard by 1.3 to 7.1 times. This is probably the consequence of building the Linh Trung export processing zone and the Thu Duc student village. Another prominent example is Binh Tan district. Since the Tan Tao industrial park was established, the population has grown very rapidly and this district is known as

the inner city of migrant workers. Thus, there have been a lot of traffic jams in the rush hour and this area has been heavily polluted. Given these points, it is of great importance to reduce urban sprawl so that we are able to protect the global environment and improve the quality of life.

In conclusion, urban sprawl is now one of the most major environmental concerns as it has many severe consequences. As shown above, urban sprawl results in not only land loss that can lead to a declining agriculture and endangered lives of species but also air pollution. In my opinion the government should take action to use existing infrastructure so that they don't foster sprawl, or to build away from those natural wildlife resources. Also, planning for parks and greenways is very essential. Equally, cities must pay attention to transportation strategies, mostly increasing roadway quality and building more pedestrian-friendly designs that encourage a greater use of bicycles, walking, and public transports. By doing so, we can both create a high-quality life of urbanism and save the environment. Let urban sprawl be no longer a problem to our country!