

Tree Talk

Trees are the Answer

When you think of air pollution and smog, do you think of South Dakota? Not many of us do because we are lucky enough to live in an area with lower levels of air pollution than states such as California or Pennsylvania. Air pollution is caused by activities such as motor vehicle exhaust, gasoline vapors, chemical solvents and industrial facilities. The 'bad' ozone given off by these factors creates many respiratory health hazards for people such as asthma, reduction in lung function, and other respiratory irritations and diseases.

Even though we don't have the concerns that other larger more polluted states have, we still need to prepare and be pro-active about keeping our air clean. Our urban areas are growing, we are driving more cars than ever, and we are consuming more. All of this leads to larger landfills & sewage treatment plants and larger pollution issues.

One way to combat the growing concerns of air pollution is to plant more trees. Trees do a great job of cleaning our air and filtering the ground level pollution that can have a negative affect on us all. Trees help by absorbing gaseous pollutants through their leaves, they trap and store particles on the uneven, rough branch and bark surfaces, and reduce local air temperatures ultimately lessening the demand for cooling and heating.

In urban areas, 'heat islands' occur where large amounts of cement and asphalt are used to create parking lots. These 'heat islands' raise the air temperature and the temperature of our vehicles that use these areas. If we plant trees properly to shade these hot parking lots, we can reduce surface temperature by 36 degrees, the temperatures in our cars can be reduced by over 47 degrees, and fuel tank temperatures by nearly 7 degrees.

If more trees were planted, there would be fewer hydrocarbon emissions from gasoline that evaporate and add to the air pollution problems that eventually cause smog. In South Dakota alone, preliminary numbers show that on average, 45% of our boulevards and street right of ways have open available places for tree planting. We should be planting many more trees in our urban and rural areas along with diversifying the species of trees we utilize.

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