

Opinion Paper Topics

Your opinion paper is meant to give you an opportunity to develop an argument for or against an issue of environmental and toxicological significance. Our impressions of environmental topics / issues tend to be based on information we glean from the media, which is often spun for reasons of impact. What we need to do as scientists is flesh out the significant information from that which is biased or of self-interest. For example, the “recent” issue around trans fats in foods. A substantial number of food products contained trans fats, from baby cookies to crackers. Suddenly, the same producers of those baby cookies presented non-trans fat cookies and in a way admonishing their own historical products. Why remove trans fats from foods? Were the food manufacturers concerned about us enough to develop a community-based conscience and then decided to save us from the trans fat based foods, or did the scientific community develop enough public awareness such that the public demanded “safer” food?

How does one develop an argument for or against trans fats? How about the consideration of air or water pollution and their impact on the environment? When was the last time you heard anything in the news about industry not meeting regulations for discharge? The first questions to ask tend to be who / what are exposed to the insult pollutants, how much exposure is there, for how long, and what are the responses? In the grand scheme of things, our current environmental issues are really only beginning to become known (say the past 40 years). Awareness of the connection between the quality of our lives and our environment became apparent to some early, and despite the fight against big business, they successfully made their points and have helped the environment in immeasurable ways. Still, millions of people live and work in seriously polluted areas.

The task with your opinion paper is to look at “current” environmental issues and flesh out the important from the business based perspectives on environmental issues.

1. What is the impact on the environment in blending gasoline with ethanol?
2. Does pavement in a city have an impact on the environment?
3. Do hybrid vehicles contribute to a healthier environment? Do water vapour emissions in this case present an environmental concern (compare to current water vapour emissions from vehicles).
4. Persistent organic pollutants can be transported to remote areas of the earth and can bioaccumulate. So, what’s the concern?
5. Carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles are a big concern, but so is methane from cows. What is being done when this comparison is made? What’s the significance?
6. Say twenty percent of all operational computers in Canada are running idle. What is the contribution to pollution from those computers?
7. Refrigeration in the third world country is necessary. How can this be done affordably without significant impact on the environment?
8. How much gasoline is consumed while an automobile is running idle in traffic? What is the environmental impact? What about the 401 being clogged with cars? Consolidate this with transporting the oil across the Atlantic.

9. Which is the better new energy alternative: solar or wind? Any others?
10. Do contrails present an environmental risk? If so, why doesn't the media do more to inform us of the dangers?
11. The quality of air in a home is important, but why the concern? What types of commercial chemicals does the average indoor dweller use per year?
12. Is breast cancer on the rise in certain geographical areas of the US and Canada?
13. Pick a topic of interest to you.

With each topic, an aspect of the paper requires a level of quantitative assessment to help make your argument. A descriptive perspective is also necessary to help make the picture of your argument clear to those with only a media based understanding of the topic.

You have up to 10 pages (no more than 8 preferably), double-spaced, to state your opinion. References are required.