

Name & Date:

Objective: IELTS Reading

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# Standard of Living and the Environment

Adapted from: AP Environmental Science – University of California College Prep

<http://cnx.org/content/col10548/latest/>



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While the earth might be able to hold many more than the current human population of six billion, at some point people will find it unacceptable to live with the crowding and pollution cause by large populations. The qualitative measure of a person's or population's quality of life is called the **standard of living**. It is associated not only with aesthetics of surroundings and levels of noise, air and water pollution, but also with levels of resource consumption.

I believe that Americans have one of the world's highest standards of living. On average we have relatively small families, large homes, many possessions, plentiful food supplies, clean water and good medical care. This is not the case in most of the developing world. All people desire to have adequate resources to provide good care for their families, and thus population in most developing countries are striving for the standard of living of developed nations.

Is it possible for all six billion people on earth to live at the same level of resource use as in the United States, Japan and Western Europe? It is my opinion, that with current technology, the answer is "no." However, this does not mean that the people of one nation are more or less entitled to a given standard of living than those of another.

In order to allow the people of other nations to have a higher standard of living,

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citizens of nations like the United States must reduce their current use of resources. Of all of the food purchased by the average American family, 10 percent is wasted. In addition, because most Americans are not vegetarians, they tend to eat high on the food chain, which requires more resources than a vegetarian diet. It is the use of all these resources that is the problem.

Calculations of ecological efficiency indicate that from one level on the food chain to the next, there is only a 10 percent efficiency in the transfer of energy. Thus people who predominately eat more grains, fruits and vegetables are getting more out of the energy required to produce the food than those who eat a lot of meat. The calories that a person gets from beef are much fewer than the calories in the grain required to raise the cattle. The person is better off eating the grain. Many more people can be sustained on a diet that consists of a larger percentage of rice, millet or wheat, rather than of fish, beef or chicken. The easiest way for Americans to use fewer resources is to just eat more grains, fruits and vegetables, and eat a lot less meat.

In addition to resources used to provide food, Americans use disproportionate amounts of natural resources such as trees (for paper, furniture and building, among other things) and fossil fuels (for automobiles, homes and industry). We also produce a great amount of "quick waste." Packaging that comes on food in the grocery store is a good example of quick waste. The hard plastic packaging used for snack foods that is immediately removed and thrown away and plastic grocery bags are both examples of quick waste. Thus, patronizing fast food restaurants increases resource consumption and solid waste production at the same time.

The good news for the environment (from both a solid waste and a resource use standpoint) is that we can easily reduce the amount of goods and resources that we use and waste without drastically affecting our standard of living. By properly inflating car tires, America could save millions of barrels of oil annually. If we were to use more renewable energy resources like solar and wind power as opposed to petroleum and nuclear energy, there would be a reduced need to extract non-renewable resources from the earth. The amount of packaging used for goods could also be reduced. Reusable canvas bags could be used for shopping and plastic and paper grocery bags could be reused.

At home, many waste materials could be recycled, instead of being thrown away. These relatively easy steps could reduce the overall ecological impact that each person has on the earth. This impact is sometimes termed a person's ecological footprint. The smaller each person's ecological footprint, the greater the standard of living possible for each person.

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**Questions 1 – 10***Do the following statements agree with the information given in the text above?**In boxes 1 - 10 on your answer sheet, write*

<b>YES</b>	if the statement agrees with the views of the writer
<b>NO</b>	if the statement contradicts the views of the writer
<b>NOT GIVEN</b>	if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this

- 1** The earth absolutely can't sustain more than six billion people.
- 2** Standard of living relates to more than just air or water pollution.
- 3** Americans are the best people in the world.
- 4** All Americans have small families and large homes.
- 5** All the people in the world could not live at the same living standards with current technology.
- 6** Reducing the global standard of living requires Americans to reduce their standard of living.
- 7** Beef, fish, and chicken are a lot nicer than grains.
- 8** Fast food restaurants are examples of produces of quick waste.
- 9** Inflating car tires is the solution to saving the environment.
- 10** It is better if people should have smaller footprints.

1		6	
2		7	
3		8	
4		9	
5		10	