

# Dwindling freshwater resources

By National Geographic Society, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.24.19

Word Count **685**

Level **840L**



Image 1. Iguazu Falls, border of Brazil and Argentina at dawn on 06/23/207. Up to 1.6 million gallons of water a second pours over Iguazu Falls. Photo by Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images

In modern America, we have access to fresh water every day. Each time we turn on the tap, plumbing systems bring this important resource into our homes. Fresh water is extremely rare, though. Less than one-thirtieth of all the water found on Earth is fresh water. The remaining water is salt water, such as what is found in the ocean.



Most of the world's fresh water is not easily accessible to humans. About seven-tenths of Earth's freshwater is locked away in the form of ice. It is found in glaciers and polar ice caps. About three-tenths of Earth's fresh water is under the surface in the form of groundwater. Only a tiny fraction of Earth's fresh water is available for human use.

Unfortunately, the available fresh water is not equally distributed throughout the world. A small group of countries has most of the world's freshwater resources. This group includes Brazil, Russia, Canada, China and the United States. About one-fifth of the world's population lives in areas with little fresh water. This lack of water affects business and politics in different places.

## Dirty Waters

Many populations do not have access to safe drinking water. In 2017, 2.1 billion people around the globe lacked access to safe drinking water. Instead, they had contaminated water. Populations drinking dirty water are more likely to become sick. Lack of access to clean water leads to more than 3 million deaths every year.

Providing clean water to poor countries is an important goal for international organizations. These groups have had much success. Between 1990 and 2015, 2.6 billion people worldwide gained access to improved water. The remaining populations still without clean water are found mostly in Africa and Asia. They represent nearly 1 billion people.

## Sources Of Food

Access to fresh water is also important for business. For example, freshwater sources allow people to develop fisheries. People harvest fish from these habitats, providing food for many people worldwide. These fisheries are both a source of food and a source of income.

Fresh water is also important for other activities such as farming. About seven-tenths of the world's fresh water is used for farming. Farmers use irrigation to transport water to their fields. Agricultural activities involve over 1 billion people and generate over \$2.4 trillion every year. In the future, demand for fresh water will only increase as populations grow. This will put further strain on Earth's limited supplies. It will make access to fresh water even more important.

## International Politics

The fight over fresh water can already be seen today in international politics. For example, Ethiopia and Egypt have long fought over Nile water resources in Africa. The Nile River supplies nearly nine-tenths of Egypt's water. However, almost nine-tenths of the Nile's water originates in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is planning to dam part of the river to generate electricity. Egypt is concerned that it might lose access to some of the Nile's waters. The disagreement has not yet turned into open conflict. However, it is clear that securing this freshwater resource is important. Control of the river will define Ethiopian-Egyptian relations for many years to come.



Conflicts over water are common throughout the world. This is true even in the United States, where freshwater sources are relatively common. One major debate concerns the Colorado River system. It supplies water to Arizona, California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. A recent drought has reduced water flow in this river system. As a result, these states need to decide how to reduce water usage in order to save the river. Population growth and climate change will create additional challenges. Conflicts over water will become even more common in the future.

## Quiz

1 Which sentence from the article supports a MAIN idea from the article?

- (A) In modern America, we have access to fresh water every day.
- (B) Each time we turn on the tap, plumbing systems bring this important resource into our homes.
- (C) The remaining water is salt water, such as what is found in the ocean.
- (D) This lack of water affects business and politics in different places.

2 Read the following paragraph from the article.

*Many populations do not have access to safe drinking water. In 2017, 2.1 billion people around the globe lacked access to safe drinking water. Instead, they had contaminated water. Populations drinking dirty water are more likely to become sick. Lack of access to clean water leads to more than 3 million deaths every year.*

How does this paragraph support the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) It shows serious problems that arise when people cannot get safe drinking water.
- (B) It explains what groups are doing to help people get access to clean water.
- (C) It describes how countries are starting to fight because of the lack of drinking water.
- (D) It highlights the idea that most of the world's fresh water is stuck in ice or underground.

3 What is the relationship between population growth and the demand for fresh water?

- (A) As the world's population stays the same, the demand for fresh water will go down.
- (B) As the world's population stays the same, the demand for fresh water will go up.
- (C) As the world's population increases, the demand for fresh water will go down.
- (D) As the world's population increases, the demand for fresh water will go up.

4 What caused Ethiopia and Egypt to recently start fighting again?

- (A) Egypt is upset that nine-tenths of the water from the Nile River starts in Ethiopia now.
- (B) Egypt is worried that they will have less water from the Nile if Ethiopia makes a dam.
- (C) Egypt and Ethiopia have been experiencing great droughts and must figure out how to save the river.
- (D) Egypt and Ethiopia are having huge population growths and there is not enough water.