

Fossil fuels

1 Before you read

Put the words in the correct places and find out how fossil fuels were formed.

Fossils were once _____, _____ and _____ that lived millions of years ago. After they had died, more _____ fell on them and they were pushed further and further down. Deep under the _____ they formed coal¹, _____ and _____. We use these as _____ fuels. In fact most of the _____ that we use today comes from these 'fossil' fuels.

plants

earth

oil

dead material

energy

small animals

natural gas

fish

¹coal [kəʊl] – Kohle

2 Fossil fuels

A We all need fossil fuels in our modern, high-tech lives. We don't just burn coal in power stations and use oil and gas for transport (cars, buses, planes and trucks). We also use them for heating and to make electricity, plastics¹ and 'man-made' materials like polyester². But very soon we are going to have problems because of them. Firstly because there isn't much fossil fuel left. As long as the fuel lasts, countries that have the fossil fuels will control who can buy them and at what price. These countries are going to get richer while others get poorer. The second big problem is that when fossil fuels burn, they produce greenhouse gases which heat the earth's atmosphere. This 'global warming' threatens us all. Burning fossil fuels also causes air pollution. In some cities the air is so bad that people have to wear masks³.



B Some cars and buses can run on vegetable oils made from plants. This sort of 'bio fuel' can be made everywhere. Also, it does not add to greenhouse gases when it burns and it is safer than fossil fuels.

But this oil isn't completely without problems: It pollutes the air, too. And there isn't enough land to grow all the food we need and all the fuel we need. If farmers use the land to grow plants for oil, then food becomes more expensive and poor people can't buy enough to eat. To get more land to grow food, people burn thousands of trees and this increases greenhouse gases, too.

¹plastic ['plæstɪk] – Kunststoff; ²polyester [pɒlɪ'estə] – Polyester, Kunstfaser; ³mask [mɑ:sk] – Atemmaske, Mundschutz

 a) Read part A and make a grid with fossil fuels and things that we use them for.

Fuels	Uses				
	Power stations	Plastics	Transport	Heating	...
coal	✓	✓			
oil		✓			
natural gas					
...					

b) Read part B. If we don't use fossil fuels for transport, what else can we use? Add to your grid.

c) Now think of what other types of energy we could use for the other activities if we didn't use fossil fuels. Add these to your grid.

3 Right or wrong


Read the text again. Which of these statements are wrong? Correct them.

1. Coal, oil and natural gas are all fossil fuels.
2. Countries with these fuels control what they are used for.
3. When fossil fuels burn, they produce plastics.
4. People who live where the air is bad have to wear man-made materials.
5. Vegetable oils are made from plants.
6. If food becomes more expensive, poor people can't buy cars.
7. If people burn trees, this increases the price of wood.

4 Using energy

a) Make a list of all the things you use every day that need energy (heating, cooking, travelling, hot water for washing, lights, ...). Add what you could use if you didn't have fossil fuels.

Uses fossil fuels or electricity from them	Could use
heating	...
oven	...
car	...
...	...

 b) Compare your list with your partner's list. Decide what you really need and what you could live without.

