All non renewable energy sources

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Nonrenewable energy comes from sources that will run out or will not be replenished in our lifetimes--or even in many, many lifetimes.

Most nonrenewable energy sources are fossil fuels: coal, petroleum, and natural gas. Carbon is the main element in fossil fuels. For this reason, the time period that fossil fuels formed (about 360-300 million years ago) is called the Carboniferous Period.

All fossil fuels formed in a similar way. Hundreds of millions of years ago, even before the dinosaurs, Earth had a different landscape. It was covered with wide, shallow seas and swampy forests.

Plants, algae, and plankton grew in these ancient wetlands. They absorbed sunlight and created energy through photosynthesis. When they died, the organisms drifted to the bottom of the sea or lake. There was energy stored in the plants and animals when they died.

Over time, the dead plants were crushed under the seabed. Rocks and other sediment piled on top of them, creating high heat and pressure underground. In this environment, the plant and animal remains eventually turned into fossil fuels (coal, natural gas, and petroleum). Today, there are huge underground pockets (called reservoirs) of these nonrenewable sources of energy all over the world.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Fossil fuels are a valuable source of energy. They are relatively inexpensive to extract. They can also be stored, piped, or shipped anywhere in the world.

However, burning fossil fuels is harmful to the environment. When coal and oil are burned, they release particles that can pollute the air, water, and land. Some of these particles are caught and set aside, but many of them are released into the air.

Burning fossil fuels also upsets Earth"s "carbon budget," which balances the carbon in the ocean, earth, and air. When fossil fuels are combusted (heated), they release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is a gas that keeps heat in Earth"s atmosphere, a process called the "greenhouse effect." The greenhouse effect is necessary to life on Earth, but relies on a balanced carbon budget.

The carbon in fossil fuels has been sequestered, or stored, underground for millions of years. By removing this sequestered carbon from the ground and releasing it into the atmosphere, Earth"s carbon budget is out of

balance. This contributes to temperatures rising faster than organisms can adapt.

Coal is a black or brownish rock. We burn coal to create energy. Coal is ranked depending on how much "carbonization" it has gone through. Carbonization is the process that ancient organisms undergo to become coal. About three meters (10 feet) of solid vegetation crushed together form 0.3 meter (one foot) of coal!

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