

Date: 29 August, 2019



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1. Fires across the Brazilian Amazon Forests: Is the world's oxygen supply at risk?

- What do the fires in the Amazon mean for the world's climate?
- What is causing the Amazon fires?
- Is the world's oxygen supply at risk?
- Is Brazil the only Amazon country seeing an uptick in fires now?

GS paper 3 (Conservation, Environmental Impact assessment)

In this video, you can find detailed answers for all the above questions.



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What is the context about?



Fires across the Brazilian Amazon have sparked an international outcry for preservation of the world's largest rainforest.



The Amazon is a vast sink for storing carbon dioxide and a key element of any plan to restrain climate change.



Any increase in deforestation there would speed up global warming as well as damage an important refuge for biodiversity.



What do the fires in the Amazon mean for the world's climate?



Fires in the Amazon not only mean the carbon-absorbing forest is disappearing, but the flames themselves are emitting millions of tons of carbon every day.



The trees and plants of the Amazon forest pull carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere as part of photosynthesis. Destruction of the forest releases carbon stored in the trees and reduce the amount of carbon dioxide used by them.



The Amazon forest holds something like 90 billion tons of carbon, and if that ends up in the atmosphere it's not a good thing. The world's atmosphere is currently holding about 415 parts per million of carbon, and the destruction of the Amazon would add roughly 38 parts per million.



What is causing the Amazon fires?



The current fires in the Amazon are not wildfires. They are manmade and are mostly set illegally by landgrabbers who are clearing the forest for cattle ranching and crops.



Deforesting the Amazon is a long, slow process. People clear the land by cutting down the vegetation during the rainy season, letting the trees dry out and burning them during the dry season. Fully clearing the dense forest for agricultural use can take several years of slashing and burning.



The number of fires increasing is because people think law enforcement won't punish them.



Is the world's oxygen supply at risk?



No. While it's commonly said that the Amazon produces 20% of the world's oxygen, climate scientists say that figure is wrong and the oxygen supply is not directly at risk in any case.



That's because forests, including the Amazon, absorb roughly the same amount of oxygen they produce. Plants do produce oxygen through photosynthesis, but they also absorb it to grow, as do animals and microbes.



That doesn't mean the fires aren't a problem for the planet. The Amazon is a critical absorber of carbon of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas produced by burning fossil fuels, like oil and coal.

Is Brazil the only Amazon country seeing an uptick in fires now?



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No. Fires are burning in other parts of the Amazon as well as other forest ecosystems in the region, including Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru.



But most of the international attention has been focused on Brazil, which contains about 60 percent of the Amazon rainforest.



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