

Can the World's Coral Reefs Be Saved?

Coral reefs are the largest structures built by any living thing, including humans. As they lie under the surface of the water, most people don't realize that they are actually like huge mountains rising from the ocean floor. Recently, many reefs have begun to suffer serious damage, and some can no longer support the wide variety of plants and other life forms they did in the past. The damage seems to come from three basic sources: direct physical destruction of the coral itself, pollution produced by humans, and the warming of ocean waters caused by climate change.

Direct Destruction

For centuries, limestone---one of the main elements found in coral---was used in the construction of houses and other types of buildings. Although it was available from other sources, limestone from coral was the usual choice in areas near an ocean. Coral is also used in jewelry making and to decorate fish tanks. Finally, some methods of fishing use explosions to break the coral reef apart. Although these practices are changing, much damage has already been done.

Human Pollution

For years, industrial pollution has had a negative effect on the world's coral reefs. Recently, however, scientists have hypothesized that another category of pollution is also threatening the reefs' survival. It appears the sunscreen that millions of swimmers use to protect their skin from the sun causes coral reefs to die. The chemicals in the sunscreen do not kill the creatures themselves. Instead, the chemicals cause the coral animals to push out the tiny brilliantly colored plants called *algae* that live inside their bodies. When this happens, the whole reef begins to die.

Climate Change

Officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have gathered information showing that climate change may be the biggest threat to conserving coral reefs worldwide. When the water gets too warm, the coral responds as if pollution is present---it forces the algae out. With the algae gone, the coral reef turns white, or 'bleaches'. This is a sure sign that the coral is no longer a living thing.

Source: MacIntyre, Paul (2009). *Reading Explorer 2: Assessment CD-ROM with Exam View*, Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage Learning

Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions with complete sentences in your own words.

1. What is the passage mainly about?
2. What does the word *they* refer to in paragraph 1, sentence 2?

3. What does the word *it* refer to in paragraph 2, sentence 2?
4. What is the main idea of paragraph 3?
5. Where does coral get its bright colors from?
6. What does a coral look like when it dies?

Answer Key

Sentences may vary, but they should all have the appropriate content, correct sentence, and fairly accurate word choice.

1. The passage mainly presents a variety of threats to coral reefs.
2. *They* refers to coral reefs.
3. *It* refers to limestone.
4. Sunscreen appears to damage coral reefs.
5. Coral gets its bright colors from algae.
6. The coral reef turns white when it dies.