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- [Home Page](#)
- [Frontpage](#)
- [News](#)
- [News In Brief](#)
- [City](#)
- [Muzaffarabad](#)
- [GK Business](#)
- [GK Sports](#)
- [Editorial](#)
- [Perspective](#)
- [Op-Ed](#)
- [Reflections](#)
- [Photo](#)
- [Cartoon](#)
- [Weather](#)

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Op-Ed

Let's kick the habit out of our lives .....

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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

..... or the habit kicks the life out of us. This is how we can celebrate our way out of the environmental mess, writes Dr. Shuja-ul-Rehman

**"You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions." - (Sven Lindqvist)**

It is not as if we don't know what we are doing to our environment . We know polythene is hazardous to human and animal life. We know what it does to our water bodies, we know how pungent the smoke of vehicles is, we know our environment is changing. Having experienced the cool shade of a tree and the solitude of a forest how can we not know that cutting trees is bad. We have seen our rice fields and vegetables gardens turn into concrete jungles . We have seen food becoming costlier than ever before. How could we then not know that we are dangerously close to starvation in the future even with wallets fuller than ever before. Well, its clear. We know it! Each one of us. It is just that we are not aware of what we know .

The World Environment Day is here again. Moving beyond mere tokenism which is so much in evidence on this day every year , this time around we should focus on generating true awareness of the environmental problem we are facing and the looming disaster that confronts us should we choose to be unaware. Global warming is a stark reality now. Carbon which is the essential element of all living things is unfortunately the culprit. The human activities that generate carbon and its oxides have been incriminated as the major causes of environmental degradation mainly carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, methane etc which are now infamously called the green house gases. Even human beings breathe out carbon dioxide. The oceans which absorb most of the carbon can take it no more. There water is turning acidic. Soon there may be so much of carbon and its deadly oxides in the air and water that every breath of ours will be a burden.

This year the United Nations Environmental Programme has set a unique theme for World Environment Day.

'Kick the habit of CO2'

According to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon we are now carbon addicts and we need to kick this deadly habit for our survival and to ensure that life persists on this planet. He says, "Addiction is a terrible thing.

It consumes and controls us, makes us deny important truths and blinds us to the consequences of our actions. Our world is in the grip of a dangerous carbon habit."

So what should we? Well....Celebrate. Sounds weird ! Yes, but there may be no alternative. Celebrations will first make us all aware of the fact that many of our actions severely damage the environment and that there is ample scope for us to reduce and even undo part of that damage by adopting some good and healthy practices. Next, to try our utmost level best to try and restrict our daily activities only to the preserving ones, gradually shutting out the damaging ones. The UNEP has come out with a wonderful and lucid way of making us aware of the good and the bad of environment. It is called "The World Environment Day Alphabet- 80 ways to celebrate". June 5th, 2008 is the World Environment Day. I urge all of us to celebrate. in any one or more ways by choosing any number of alphabets and the associated actions. Say , for example, if we avoid plastic bags, we would have celebrated WED in our own way. If we reduce the use of your car and use the public transport more often we would have celebrated it. 'Celebration', because it helps protect our fragile environment which in itself is ample reason to celebrate and rejoice. Even writing this piece is a celebration as it increases awareness. But this is one celebration which must go on 365 days a year if we have to keep this earth for ourselves and the posterity with a focus on kicking the habit. Remember the proverb " One generation plants a tree; the next generation gets the shade." So here is the alphabet. Go ahead and celebrate !!

- A
- Adopt a 'green' way of life
  - Art made of recycled materials
  - Auctions to benefit an environmental project
  - Award presentations for environmental competitions
  - Awareness campaigns

B

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Bicycle parades/races  
Broadcast of public service announcements (TV and Radio)  
Buy a fuel-efficient car

**C**  
Calculate your carbon footprint  
Carpools  
Celebrity support  
Clean-up campaigns  
Competitions (banner, drawing, essay, painting, poster, poetry)  
Conferences on the environment

**D**  
Debates on environment issues  
Dedicate your blog to World Environment Day on 5 June  
Distribute leaflets, brochures and posters  
Donate to an environmental cause  
Top

**E**  
Environmental education programmes in schools  
Excursions to nature sites  
Exhibitions (drawings, posters, photos, paintings)

**F**  
Fairs  
Festivals  
Film festivals on the environment

**G**  
Give a gift membership of an environmental organisation  
Guidelines to community-based environmental activities

**H**  
Hoist banners at major road intersections  
Help local environmental groups organise WED events

**I**  
Inform all your friends about WED  
Involve various partners (NGOs, ministries, youth groups, celebrities, private sector)  
Issue First Day Covers (stamps)

**J**  
Join an environmental group  
Join UNEP's carbon neutral network  
Join the Billion Tree Campaign

**K**  
Keep your neighbourhood clean  
Kick-start an environmental campaign  
Kick the CO2 habit!  
Know your rights

**L**  
Launch of government environment policies, books, reports  
Lobby local authorities to adopt sound environmental policies

**M**  
March for the environment  
Media coverage and activities

**N**  
Never litter

**O**  
Offset your emissions  
Organic farming/cooking  
Organize a WED themed event in your neighbourhood

**P**

Parades  
Performances (plays, songs, poetry)  
Plant a tree  
Plastic bags: avoid them!  
Promotional material (t-shirts, stickers, bookmarks)  
Puppet shows for children with an environmental message

**Q**  
Quizzes related to the theme for schools, youth groups, company staff, etc...

**R**  
Rainwater harvesting  
Rallies  
Ratify international environmental conventions  
Reduce, re-use, recycle  
Rehabilitate natural habitats  
Replace your light-bulbs with energy saving ones

**S**  
Save paper  
Seminars  
Sort rubbish  
Speeches  
Sponsorship from private sector  
Sports activities  
Switch off stand-by TV and computer

**T**  
Take action  
T-shirts for WED

**U**  
Use sustainable modes of transportation (walking, jogging, cycling, skating, carpool)

**V**  
Vehicle emission monitoring  
Vermicomposting  
Visits to botanical gardens and national parks  
Volunteer for organizations such as Clean Up the World

**W**  
Waste less!  
Workshops  
Write plays, poems, songs  
Write letters to civic leaders, members of parliament, government and newspapers

**X**  
Xchange ideas  
Xpect environmental responsibility

**Y**  
Youth-led activities

**Z**  
Zoom not, pass slowly

(Dr. Shuja ul Rehman is Development Practitioner & Environmental Activist)

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- » Wednesday, June 04, 2008
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- » Monday, June 02, 2008
- » Sunday, June 01, 2008
- » Saturday, May 31, 2008
- » Friday, May 30, 2008
- » Thursday, May 29, 2008
- » Wednesday, May 28, 2008
- » Tuesday, May 27, 2008
- » Monday, May 26, 2008

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