

# Ten Activities That Demonstrate You Are Not Thinking about the Future

As environmental scientists and engineers, we spend a lot of our time thinking about future implications of past, current, and planned activities on the environment. We question whether things we are doing today will have implications on human and environmental health in the years and decades to come. For example, how will chemicals that pass through water treatment systems affect the health of people in this and future generations? How can we sustain our water infrastructure in the future if our systems are run on nonsustainable fossil fuels? Can we develop a sustainable urban infrastructure? To really address these important and long-term issues, people must have a strong resolve to look to the future and address problems that impact humanity and our environment over the decades and centuries to come. But when I observe certain activities by people, I start to wonder if it is in the nature of these people to consider their actions relative to the distant or even near future. Here are some of my personal observations about how people can demonstrate their lack of concern for their future (or the future of others).

**10. Riding a Motorcycle without a Helmet.** As a former motorcycle rider, this one really puzzles me. Choose one of the most dangerous forms of travel, and then avoid wearing the most important safety item, your helmet. A single poor driving decision on the part of a motorcycle driver or other automobile drivers, or just a slippery road, can end in serious injury or death. Even when the motorcyclist survives a crash, the resulting injuries can affect not only their own future but also the finances and well-being of their families, friends, and those around them.

**9. Arguing for Jobs ... at Any Cost.** The argument of many people always seems to come back to the "we need jobs" mantra, spanning workers for construction of more and more new buildings to coal mining. Zoning plays an important role in the health and sustainability of a community, especially where existing buildings and housing sites sit vacant. We do not always need more buildings, and abandoned commercial sites are not good for the long-term health and well-being of our community. For other jobs, such as mining coal, working in this field contradicts plain old good sense. Coal miners argue in favor of their job at any cost, and yet if they succeed, they put their life and future generations in peril through both coal extraction and utilization, which releases CO<sub>2</sub> and other pollutants into the air. There are always implications of our jobs relative to the safety of our families and the sustainability of our communities, so the "cost" of certain jobs is always important. Longer-term solutions must be considered in the balance of perils from gaining immediate employment.

**8. Denying Vaccinations for Your Children.** The science is pretty clear that vaccinations help to protect the health of everyone. No medical procedure is completely safe, but microbes are determined to reproduce in your body. By denying vaccinations, you are helping to move into a future where diseases can affect you and those around you and, because of globalism, others around the world.

**7. Engaging in Distracted Driving.** When I walk the university hallways during classroom time changes, I am amazed at how many people are staring at their phone and not watching where they are going. The result is a lot of near collisions and bumping around. How much are you thinking about the future if you are doing the same thing in a car moving at 55 miles per hour? It does not make sense.

**6. Gambling and Playing the Lottery.** Statistics should be taught and reinforced every year in public education because on average, people that gamble must believe that they can beat the odds. Training in statistics could provide them better information. A casino is just a big beautiful building where people walk in and throw away their money. It would be easier to just have a big garbage pail at the front door. The lottery is just as bad, as you do not even need the building. Anyone that is gambling or playing the lottery is not showing great concern for their future, except in some cases to help the state budget get balanced or fund civic projects.

**5. Allowing Guns Everywhere.** People do not usually make great instantaneous decisions, especially when stressed. So, I do not think it is a great idea to have a room or stadium filled with lots of people with guns. Note: Guns are especially a problem when mixed with alcohol.

**4. Smoking.** It is expensive, annoying, harmful to those around you, and a proven killer. Not much more needs to be said on this one.

**3. Littering.** Why would littering be such a prominent sign of showing a lack of concern for the future? It is mostly due to my definition of litter, which includes more than just throwing paper out the car window. It includes chemicals and nanoparticles released into rivers and drinking water sources, solid wastes that go to landfills, nuclear waste that is not going anywhere these days, and the release into the air of CO<sub>2</sub> that is derived from burning fossil fuels. Our constant littering is a staggering sign of not thinking about our environmental future.

**2. Not Voting.** A democracy works only if people pay attention to who is running and choose their leaders by casting votes and helping to elect people who truly care about the lives of the people they govern. If you do not vote, then you are allowing others to dictate your future, and the safety and health of our environment.

**1. Voting for Incompetent People or People with Agendas That Endanger Our Environment and Future.** An incompetent leader in business can ruin a company, but an incompetent leader of a nation can ruin the world. A competent leader with a selfish or short-sighted agenda can be even worse. Elected officials at higher levels should have demonstrated experience in politics and be judged by their previous actions in government and life. You do not get to be a surgeon without

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going to medical school, and you cannot practice law without passing the bar. So how can a president, or other high-ranking individuals, be elected with no demonstrated experience in politics? Voting for a person with no demonstrated abilities in governmental administration is a sure sign of not really thinking about the people in this nation and their future. In the United States, we currently have a president who has never held any previous governmental position. Many people chosen for the president's cabinet or to lead our national agencies are similarly without experience in these agencies or in government. Some of these people have been so critical of the agencies they now lead that it feels like the foxes are guarding the hen house. Maybe it is even worse than that, because the fox would like to keep the hen house going and fully stocked.

If you look at this list, and consider all the actions that demonstrate a lack of concern about the future through activities, the last one might just have the most global impact. Hopefully, government officials in the United States and other countries that are elected or appointed will be ones that care about the people and the environment of their countries, and others in the world, for a long time to come.



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##### Notes

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