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Global Op Ed

In March of 1964, Kitty Genovese was fatally stabbed to death after 2 failed attempts, when the cops canvased the area 38 onlookers reported witnessing the killing. Not once did anyone come to her assistance, or even call the cops. This phenomenon is chillingly common, known as the bystander affect, it has been observed that often times the number of witnesses decreases the likelihood that any individual witness will take it upon themselves to intervene. The rationale of each individual bystander is that among so many witnesses surely someone will do something, resulting in collective inaction. Although the bystander effect is prevalent in criminology, it also has strong implications for environmental apathy.

This same phenomenon applies to environmental conservation. It’s easy to shrug off a polluted world as everyone else’s problem, but it’s a communal sin to let your front yard accumulate trash or even to let your grass grow too tall. You are personally accountable for your property; it’s deterioration is undoubtedly your fault. On the contrary, the environment is the shared responsibility of all seven billion of earth’s inhabitants and just like a large group projects this shared responsibility enables slackers. The real calamity of the situations is the fact that, we know it’s happening, we know it’s our fault, we even know what we can do to stop it and yet we don’t

Unfortunately, unless people are subjected to extreme conditions, they do not realize the importance of their relationship with their environment. Currently planet Earth’s eco system is crumbling. We are experiencing a loss of bio diversity at a rate only matched by the earth’s last mass extinction event, which took place over 66 million years ago. Global warming has destabilized the climate, exacerbated by unprecedented emissions of green house gas, resulting in massive storm events and sea level rise. These changes drastically alter life on earth, but its effect on our day-to-day lives can be hard to pin point because they are often indirect. While some effects can be felt directly, for example, inhaling China’s toxic smog, others appear unrelated like an increase in the price of groceries caused by crop failures or conflicts that arise over increasingly scarce resources.

The only way to meaningfully address this public indifference is through early education. By chance I was born into an outdoorsy family and was placed in elementary school classrooms with environmentally conscious teachers. The impact these influences made on me early in life have inspired me to peruse engineering in the hopes of pioneering clean energy. Modernized countries have to institutionalize the students valuing and interacting with their immediate surroundings in primary education. Clearly, informing the public there is a serious problem does little to nothing to address the bystander affect. Furthermore it is paramount young children learn about and interact with their own environment in order to make saving the environment a personal goal rather than a dismissible staple of hippie counter culture. Teaching a group of inner city kids who have never seen the ocean in real life about marine conservation would prove rather ineffective. If those students were instead charged with improving their own local environment they would take damage to that environment very personally and by extension damage to any environment.

Once upon a time, man had to heed his surroundings in order to survive, today, in a paradigm shift, the environment struggles to survive mankind. There have been countless initiatives and programs aimed at amending the damage we have done to life on earth, and yet every time data is collected, scientists conclude that we are simply not doing enough. It’s not because it’s too late, or that the fate of the planet is out of our hands, it’s because were not doing enough. In order to save our selves and all the beauty that makes this gigantic rock Earth, we have to ensure everyone understands their connection to the environment and the part they have to play in saving it.