

Summary on Ocean Acidification

This document summarizes the background material about ocean acidification covered in the introductory section of the educational game [Ocean Protector](#).

Contents

What is ocean acidification?	1
What causes ocean acidification?	2
Burning Fossil Fuels	2
Nutrient Pollution.....	2
How do we measure ocean acidification?.....	3
How has ocean pH changed over time?	3
How does ocean acidification harm ocean life and people?	4
What can we do to help?	5

What is ocean acidification?

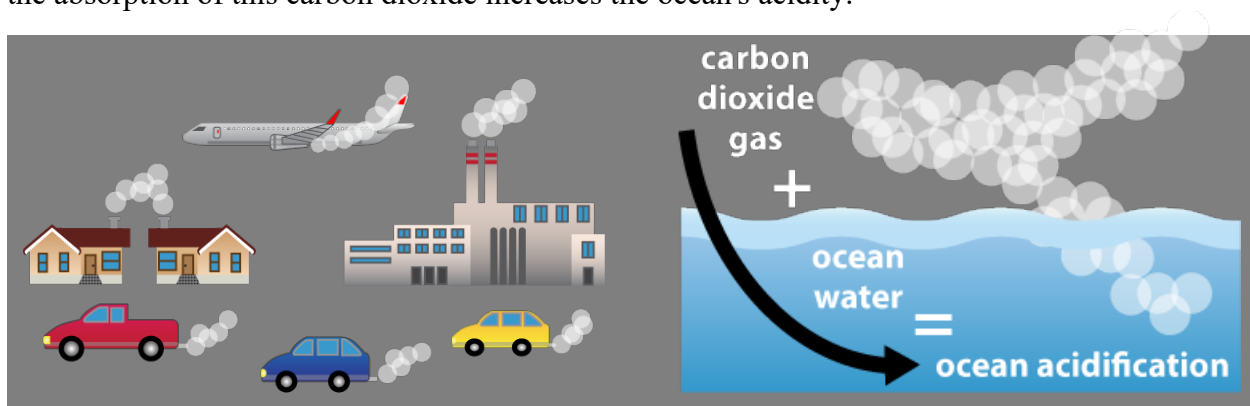
One of the human-caused threats to our oceans is that ocean water is becoming more acidic. This threat is called ocean acidification, and it occurs when the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This causes a fundamental and global change in the chemistry of the ocean (more info at [NOAA](#)). Ocean acidification hurts life throughout our oceans, including us.

What causes ocean acidification?

Burning Fossil Fuels

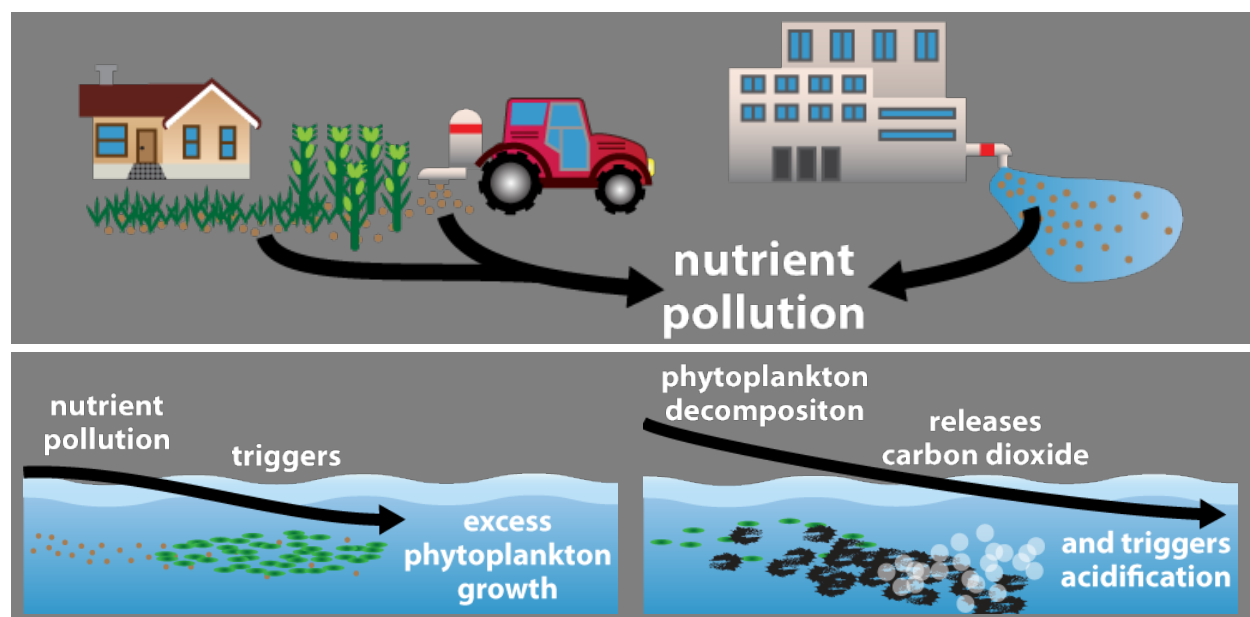
As humans, we produce large amounts of carbon dioxide gas when burning fossil fuels to drive cars, fly planes, make electricity, and run factories.

Our oceans absorb much of this excess carbon dioxide gas. While the ocean itself is not acidic, the absorption of this carbon dioxide increases the ocean's acidity.



Nutrient Pollution

Coastal acidification can occur due to excess nutrient pollution such as excess fertilizers and garbage. Nutrient pollution that runs into the ocean can trigger a sequence of events that leads to more carbon dioxide in the water, which causes coastal acidification.

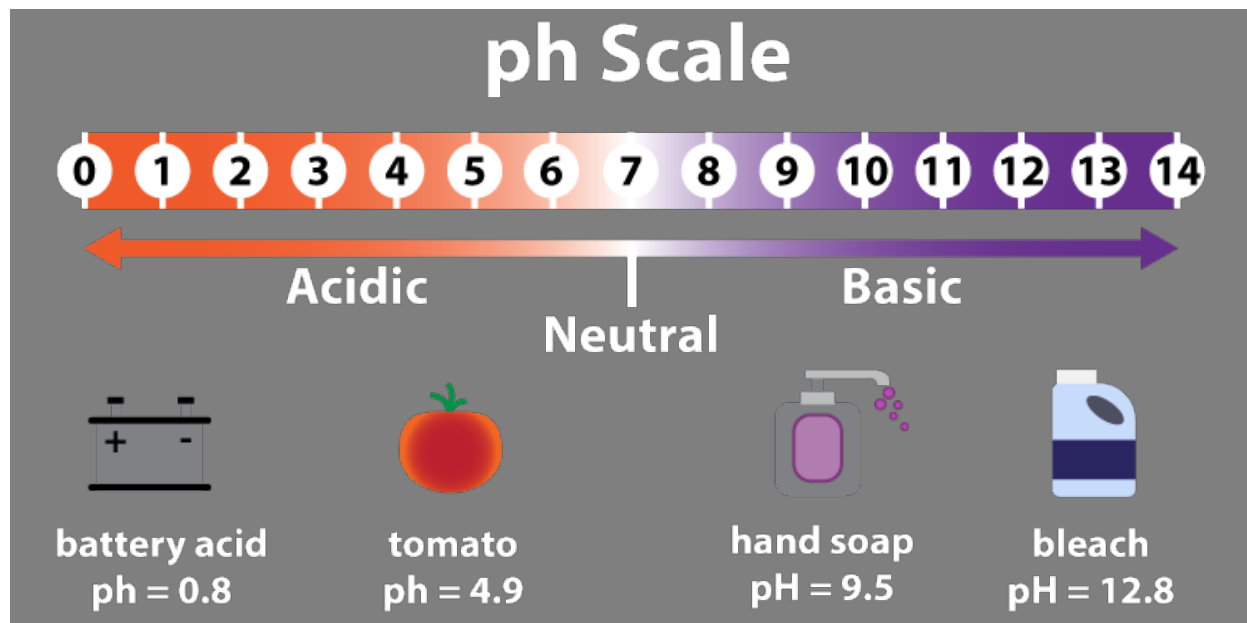


How do we measure ocean acidification?

We use the pH scale to measure how acidic or basic something is.

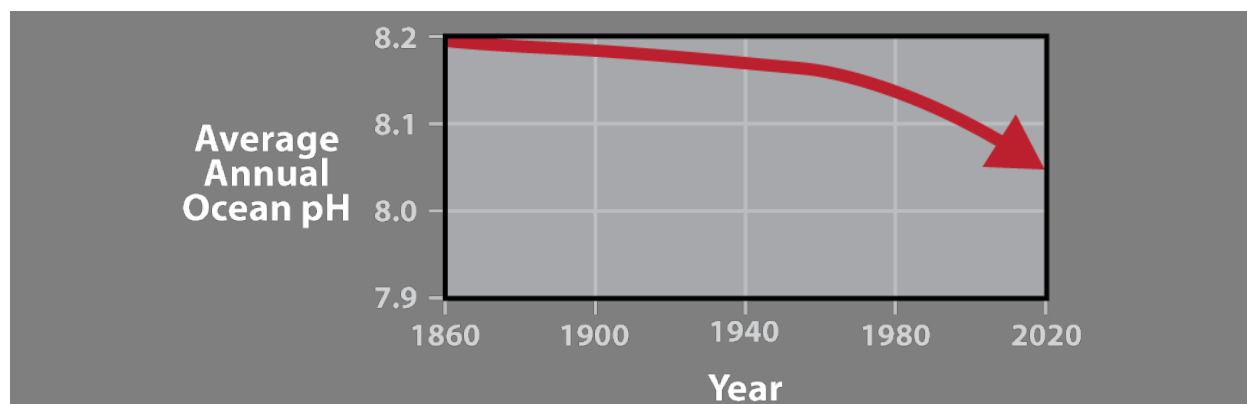
The pH scale runs from 0 to 14, with 7 being a neutral pH.

Values above 7 are basic, or alkaline. Values below 7 are acidic.



How has ocean pH changed over time?

Comparing pH of today's oceans to pH measurements of the past shows that pH today is 30% lower than the pH measured over 150 years ago. The decrease in pH means our oceans have become significantly more acidic, which hurts ocean life and humans.

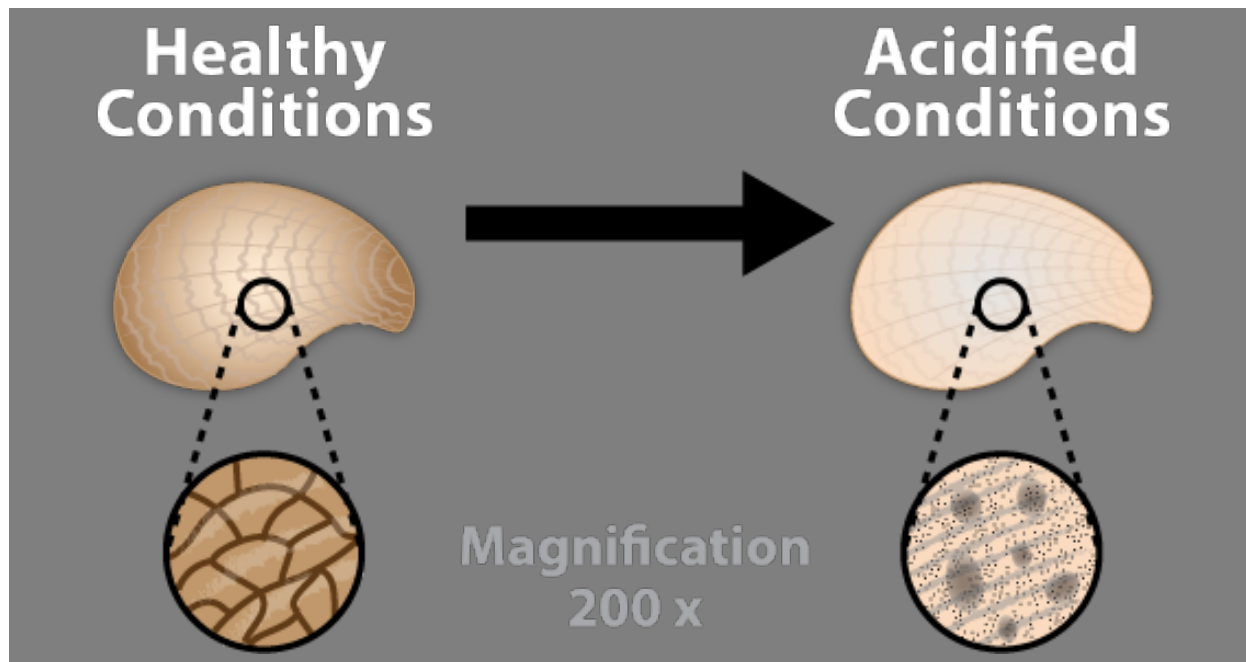


How does ocean acidification harm ocean life and people?

Ocean acidification hurts life throughout our oceans, including us. As you play [Ocean Protector](#) you will see many examples of how ocean acidification harm groups of life. Some specific examples are also listed below.

For example, increased ocean acidity reduces fish size and populations. Some fish grow slower while others have more difficulty avoiding predators, and less will survive. Lower fish populations negatively affect many animals that rely on them for food, including humans.

Ocean acidification also can substantially harm coral and other ocean life. Many animals, such as coral and oysters, build shells and exteriors from a compound called carbonate. Ocean acidification causes chemical changes that make carbonate become scarce, which results in many animals having weaker and unhealthy shells and exteriors.



Overall, ocean acidification impacts many animals in the ocean that humans rely on for food and to make a living. Also, unhealthy oceans mean that potential new medicines from our oceans are less likely to be discovered.

What can we do to help?

Our oceans affect us all, even those of us who live far away from the coast. It's up to all of us to help protect the oceans and reduce ocean acidification.

Overall ways that will help prevent ocean acidification include:

- Reducing the amount of carbon dioxide gas we emit as humans.
- Reducing the amount of nutrient pollution that runs into our oceans.
- Sharing what you have learned with people you know! The more people become aware of ocean acidification, the more we can do to help prevent it.

As you continue through the game you will be presented with many different options on how to possibly reduce ocean acidification. After selecting each choice, you will also see how your decision affects ocean life and people.

To learn more about ocean acidification check out other great resources from NOAA here:
<https://oceanacidification.noaa.gov/>