



# ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS: WHO HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY?

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This week, [Nina Green](#) looks back on the Amazon rainforest fires and asks the question of who is at fault and why that matters.

The fires ravaging through the Brazilian Amazon have been reported on globally in recent months, and it's time to have a real discussion about it - although you'd be right in thinking that it was also time back at the end of summer. These fires have left me asking important questions, besides just the ones involving environmental impacts.

For example, to what extent do 'countries' or political borders count when it comes to the global threat of natural resources? While it's true that these fires are taking place mostly within Brazil's borders, we can consider this a global issue because of the huge environmental contribution the Amazon gives to our world.

## **Background to catch you up to speed**

In August 2019, fires began spiking within the Brazilian boundaries of the Amazon. In the dry season from July to October, forest fires do occur naturally,



A significant difference is that these fires have mainly been started by loggers and farmers to clear land for crops or grazing. A little known fact is that [Brazil is the largest exporter of beef](#) in the world, which explains why burning these fires for more grazing land means more money for these ranchers.

These fires have been destroying unimaginable amounts of land, meaning homes for indigenous people and wildlife (some of which can only be found in this region). The increase in fires is mostly being tied to [recently inaugurated President Jair Bolsonaro's](#) environmental policies.

### Why you should care

This matters because the Amazon is the largest rainforest in the world. More than that, it stores some of the largest reserves of carbon in the world, which slows down the pace of global warming. You might have heard the Amazon rainforest being described as the [Lungs of the World](#) (although there's [controversy](#) over that because when isn't there controversy?). I consider this to be a global resource because without it, our planet as a whole would deteriorate even faster and we'll lose it to global warming much sooner.

This rainforest is a natural resource we will NOT be able to get back if lost. Scientists fear that the Amazon is dangerously close to [dieback](#), which is an irreversible step in ecosystem destruction. Once it reaches its tipping point, it will lose its rainforest qualities and start to degrade into a savannah.

In my opinion, what's needed is a sustainable economy alternative for that region of



For instance, the Brazilian government could offer more financial incentives to farmers. The reason this would help is that at the moment, burning land is actually way more profitable than keeping a small farm. The people who live in the rural Amazon rainforest express that conservation doesn't pay the bills; cattle do.

If the president added extra incentives to farmers with smaller herds, it's possible the intentional setting of fires would decrease. However, this assumes that the president is benevolent, which his presidency has so far shown him to be far from.

Another global scale option would be that if countries around the globe created a fund for the conservation of the Amazon, some of these funds would go directly to farmers in the region. There would be no need for deforestation because they'd have additional income without burning forests for their cattle.

However, am I (or my country's leader) to dictate how people in remote villages earn income?

### **What can we do to preserve and restore natural ecosystems?**

From across the globe, what can we do to aid this environmental crisis? There's many little things we can do here and there that actually do make a big difference in the future of the Amazon. Here are a few things I personally do to help:

Something very simple we can all do is cut down our beef consumption (something



options. Reducing mass consumption of meat, especially beef drives down demand for this product, making it less profitable for farmers and ranchers to clear more land for their cattle. Additionally, it saves water (1,799 gallons of water is needed to produce one pound of beef).

Another thing to be conscious of is our paper consumption and waste. The deforestation happening in Brazil is not only for farming, it's also being done to produce paper and wood products on a large scale. While it may be an adjustment to reduce or recycle paper products, you can turn to [Rainforest Alliance](#) for recommended and certified forest safe products.

I also think one of the best things you can do is to stay up to date and educated about environmental issues. With so many different media outlets reporting on international issues like the Amazon fires, it's easy to get swept up in the sensationalism that last for only a short news cycle in most cases. Do your own research and know the facts for yourself so you can stop the spread of misinformation. Good resources are [The Daily Climate](#), and official international organization's websites like the [UNEP](#) and [IUCN](#).

With this information, you can create and personalize how you feel is the best way to help save our ecosystems here on Earth. To see high-quality images from the frontlines of the fires, [go to this Al Jazeera gallery](#).

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