



## Future Conditional



### *Introduction*

Future Conditional investigates the link between environment change and the health of our planet as millions of people must cope with the spread of toxic pollution. Locations: the Arctic, Mexico, Uzbekistan and the United States.

The Arctic — a once pristine wilderness under siege. Mexico — living in the shadow of tariff-free factories. Uzbekistan — caught between its Silk Road heritage and the realities of the 21st century. And the United States — a Latino neighborhood celebrates an environmental victory — while a sanctuary for biodiversity becomes a graveyard for millions of birds. Journey To Planet Earth investigates the global link between the release of toxic pollutants and the health of our planet.

We begin our journey in the Arctic, an isolated and vulnerable world of extremes. In many ways, this is the perfect place to investigate the future health of our planet — a future conditional on how we cope with the spread of toxic pollution.

The Arctic is a place dominated by the rhythms of nature and the seasonal patterns of migration. It's a place of deep fiords teeming with life and remote fishing villages governed by the endless cycle of strong tidal currents. However, the image that most people have of the polar region — of a pristine unspoiled wilderness — is far from accurate. The Arctic, which has very few sources of industrial pollution, is turning into a toxic sink. In a phenomenon scientists call the grasshopper effect, toxic pollutants released thousands of miles to the south evaporate in the warm climate then ride the winds until they reach the cold air of the Arctic, where they eventually fall to the earth.

Thousands of miles to the south in Tijuana, the community of Colonia Chilpancingo suffered from a much more local source of pollution. When it rains a nearby creek is flooded with chemical wastes from a deserted industrial park upstream. Lead oxides, sulfites, heavy metals, sulfuric acid, and arsenic travel in the contaminated waterway, which weaves its way through the shantytown community. It poisons everything and everyone in its path — including the community's only source of water.



Over the border just 17 miles north, the San Diego community of Barrio Logan celebrates its victory over one of its neighborhood's chief polluters, a small industrial factory called Master Plating. Although the struggle against environmental threats to the community's health has lasted decades, the price of not fighting is too high not to pay.

Over 7,000 miles away in the Central Asian nation of Uzbekistan, the death of the Aral Sea has become a never-ending nightmare. The rivers that fed the sea were diverted to increase the region's cotton production, leaving behind a toxic dust that is poisoning the people.

Though most scientists have concluded that it's too late to save the Aral Sea, it does serve as a graphic warning for the people of Palm Springs who may live in the path of a potential storm of toxic dust. Just beyond the Salton Sea is a vast network of generators that harness the power of the wind, providing ample electricity but also serving as a reminder that high winds are a natural part of the local environment.

As the Salton Sea begins to recede, toxic dust storms will inevitably come off the dried-out lakebed. Despite this danger, the transfer of water from the Sea to the city of San Diego has gone forward without an agreed upon plan or even adequate funds to remedy the situation. Could Californians be risking a similar health crisis as the people of Uzbekistan?

This new reality presents us with enormous challenges for the future. It is a future conditional on providing new ideas, new attitudes and new hope.

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