
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Changing the Earth's climate



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Sam

And I'm Sam. It's hard to feel positive when you hear about climate change, don't you think, Neil?

Neil

Yes, according to the UN's Cop 26 conference, we're heading for a catastrophic global temperature rise of three degrees by the end of this century... Fires are blazing from the Amazon to the Arctic... And even if we stopped burning all fossil fuels tomorrow, it would take decades to feel the effects. It's all very depressing!

Sam

I agree, but there is hope that catastrophes can be avoided thanks to some amazing ideas by some very imaginative scientists. In this programme, we'll be discussing geoengineering – the name for a collection of new scientific plans to remove carbon from the atmosphere and stop global warming.

Neil

Also called 'climate repair', geoengineering is still in the experimental stages. Some technologies are controversial because they interfere with natural climate systems, and others may not even be possible.

Sam

One ingenious idea to cool the planet involves spraying diamond dust in the sky to deflect the Sun's rays.

Neil

Amazing! But before we find out more, I have a question for you, Sam. Spraying diamond dust in the sky sounds futuristic, but in the 1960s there was a band who wrote a song called 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds'. But which band? Was it:

- a) The Rolling Stones?
- b) The Beach Boys? or
- c) The Beatles?

Sam

I think most people would say the answer is c) The Beatles.

Neil

OK, we'll find out the answer later in the programme. Now, throwing diamonds in the sky might sound crazy but it's far from the wildest idea scientists have thought up to decarbonise the planet.

Sam

Oceans hold sixteen times more carbon than the Earth's atmosphere and could hold even more if the fish and plankton living there had more available **nutrients** – food that animals and plants need to grow.

Neil

But how to provide these nutrients? Believe it or not, one answer involves - you guessed it - whale poo!

Sam

David King chairs the Centre for Climate Repair at Cambridge University. He explained how his unusual idea would work to BBC World Service programme, Discovery:

David King

Imagine now a **pod** of whales all coming up and pooing in the same area of the ocean. This could be in an **eddy** current, and it could lead to something like 10,000 to 20,000 square kilometres being covered in nutrients, including iron. And as we know from observations today, within three months that region is **chock-a-block** with fish.

Neil

Whales live in groups called **pods**. They swim up to the ocean surface to poo, and this poo can be spread in an **eddy** – a large current of water moving in a circular motion, like a giant whirlpool.

Sam

As a result, huge areas of the ocean are covered in nutrients, and become **chock-a-block** with fish – an informal way to say 'full of fish'.

Neil

Another original idea being explored is 'rock weathering'. Carbon is slowly locked into rocks and mountains over thousands of years by natural geological processes. This literally ground-breaking idea would speed up the process by locking carbon into rocks that have been dug up through industrial mining.

Sam

Listen as geochemist, Professor Rachael James, explains her idea to BBC World Service's, Discovery:

Rachael James

For every tonne of rock that's mined, only a very tiny proportion, a couple of grams of that, is actually diamond. The rest of it is effectively waste. So, mine waste material is potentially a really great source of material that could be **repurposed** for enhanced rock weathering and I think that's really good because it creates a **circular economy**.

Sam

Mining for diamonds creates tonnes of waste rock which could be used to capture carbon. Professor James wants to **repurpose** this rock – to find a new use for it.

Neil

Not only would this lock more carbon, it also creates a **circular economy** – an economic model which involves sharing, reusing and recycling products for as long as possible to avoid waste and to reduce levels of carbon.

Sam

While these ideas might sound strange, they're all theoretically possible. And looking to science for positive solutions reminds some people of the early ecological movement which started in the 1960s and now, fifty years later, is being taken seriously.

Neil

Speaking of the 1960s, it's time to reveal the answer to my question, Sam.

Sam

Ah yes, you asked me which sixties band wrote the song, Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. I said, confidently, c) The Beatles.

Neil

Which was, of course... the correct answer! John Lennon and Paul McCartney

wrote the song in 1967 but I doubt even they could have predicted that it would inspire a scientific idea to save the planet!

Sam

OK, let's recap the vocabulary from the programme, starting with **nutrients** – food that plants and animals need to grow.

Neil

Whales and other sea mammals like dolphins live in a group called a **pod**.

Sam

An **eddy** is a large current of water moving in a circular motion.

Neil

Chock-a-block is an informal way to say 'full of something'.

Sam

If you **repurpose** something, you find a new use for it – a use other than what was originally intended.

Neil

And finally, the planet's future might depend on the **circular economy** – an economic system which values sharing, reusing and recycling over consumption and waste.

Sam

These incredible scientific innovations might mean that time is not yet up for planet Earth - but time is up for this programme.

Neil

Join us again soon for more trending topics and related vocabulary here at 6 Minute English. Goodbye for now!

Sam

Bye!

VOCABULARY

nutrient

food that plants and animals need to live and grow

pod

group of whales, also other sea mammals such as dolphins

eddy

large current of water moving in a circular motion

chock-a-block

very full of people or things; plenty of something

repurpose

find a new use for something

circular economy

economic model which involves sharing, reusing, and recycling existing products as long as possible to avoid waste and to fight climate change