

# SUSTAINABLE STORIES AND SOLUTIONS FOR OUR PLANET

A science investigation pack for  
teachers of 9–11 year olds:  
Sustainable materials



CENTRE for INDUSTRY  
EDUCATION COLLABORATION

  
**Thomas Swan**  
Chemical manufacturing since 1926



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# INTRODUCTION

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The future holds many challenges for young people and our current model of development is placing an increasing burden on the planet. In order to secure the future of children all over the world, we need to make a decisive move towards sustainable development.

This publication will introduce and develop some of the issues and impacts of sustainability for primary aged children aged 9-11 years. All activities are linked to the English National Curriculum for Science, with a focus on the Year 5 programme of study for science content and the full upper key stage two programme of study for working scientifically.

Given that young children will become the next generation of adults; it is important that they are educated about sustainability issues so they can take positive action to help preserve their future in a changing world.

There are many definitions of sustainability. One of the most frequently used is taken from Our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report (1987):

*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

In simple terms, sustainable development means meeting the needs of all people now – without having a negative impact on the needs of people living in the future.

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

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In the two introductory activities, children consider their own motives behind sustainability as well as develop an awareness of vocabulary linked to current environmental issues. A glossary provides a comprehensive list of all key environmental vocabulary introduced here, then used throughout the activities. Children are encouraged to return to their original ideas to compare their definitions, make any final amendments and reflect upon the learning that has taken place.

## MAIN ACTIVITIES

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There are five main activities, which introduce children to a range of different challenges within the context of the sustainability of common materials such as metal, plastic, fabric and food. The investigative approach provides opportunities for children to explore the varied roles of scientists and engineers in practical ways, allowing the development of key skills including discussion and problem solving. It is intended that children be encouraged to develop their own ideas and questions, methods of recording, conclusions and recommendations. The Questions for thinking included within each activity should be asked as a ‘drip-feed’ throughout, even though they are written towards the end of each set of teachers’ notes.

## POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

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A presentation accompanies each main activity, and contains opportunities for higher order thinking, further discussion, and research. They have been created to help children develop a deeper understanding of our impact on the planet and encourage them to weigh up different opinions and evidence for themselves. Empowering young people to take responsibility for their own future is not only desirable: it is a crucial feature of their education.<sup>1</sup>

Each presentation extends the sustainability message to include wider environmental issues such as the environmental impact of personal hygiene products and the impact of the choices that we make, vehicle emissions and air pollution, single-use plastics and the importance of recycling, the environmental impact of washing and replacing items of clothing, alternative diets and an awareness of our carbon footprint, our use of fossil fuels and the development of renewable sources of energy.

The final slides of each presentation contain one company's story to embed the children's learning of sustainability into real life industrial contexts. This is what makes this publication unique in that, for every problem posed within the original main activity, children will learn about one company's solution and find out about how scientists and engineers are striving to find answers to sustainability issues.

In addition to the PowerPoint presentations, teachers may wish to make links with industry via local companies and company websites. STEM Ambassadors are volunteers from a wide range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics related jobs across the UK. They offer their time and enthusiasm and can be found via the STEM Learning website at **<https://www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors>**

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<sup>2</sup> Our Common Future (the Brundtland Report): United Nations through Oxford University Press, 1987.

# SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

THEME	SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES	APPROXIMATE TIME TAKEN
Introductory activity 1: Preparatory survey	A survey is carried out by each child to ascertain their thoughts about sustainability as well as their understanding of the impact of their own behaviour in actively bringing about change. Children are encouraged to question family members and compile an overview of current attitudes towards sustainability.	30 mins (+ 30 minutes discussion)
Introductory activity 2: Environmental vocabulary	Children are challenged to create a 'big-book' style environmental dictionary which will help others in their school to learn about important environmental issues. They suggest definitions for a list of words provided and then refer to the glossary and return to the task to make amendments as they learn more about environmental issues in subsequent activities.	30 minutes (+ 15 minutes after each main activity)
1. Sustainable materials: which metal?	Children investigate how metals can corrode when exposed to substances in the environment and that rusting is one type of corrosion. They are introduced to the properties and uses of precious metals and consider how one company uses these to reduce the amount of dangerous gases emitted by high numbers of vehicles on our roads today.	2–3 hours (+ ongoing observations)
2. Sustainable materials: which plastic?	Children are challenged to identify and name unknown plastics by observing what happens when samples are placed in different liquids and when a force is applied. They learn about the impact that plastics can have on the environment and why it is important to recycle plastic items. They consider how one company supports a recycling scheme to reduce the amount of U-PVC that is usually used once and sent to landfill sites.	1–2 hours
3. Sustainable methods of cleaning: which washing product?	Groups of children plan and carry out their own fair test to investigate how effective different commercial washing products are at removing stains from fabric. They will consider how one company has developed an ingredient for a new washing product which washes clothes more effectively than ever so that we do not have to wash or replace them more than we need to.	2–3 hours
4. Sustainable sources of food: how can we grow oyster mushrooms?	Children consider the benefits of following a more sustainable diet as an alternative to obtaining meat from animals as a source of protein. They are challenged to grow a crop of oyster mushrooms as a sustainable food source before learning about one company's solution to producing protein-rich food in a sustainable way.	1–2 hours (+ ongoing observations)
5. Sustainable sources of energy: which plant material?	Children consider the need for renewable energy and how this can be less harmful to the environment than burning fossil fuels. They are challenged to carry out two investigations for a fictitious company in order to find a sustainable plant-based source of fuel. They learn about a real company's solution to producing energy for electricity from natural, sustainable sources such as plants.	1–2 hours

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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It is important that schools refer to their own health and safety policies when planning, testing and evaluating all practical science activities for themselves. Resources and expectations must be age appropriate and investigations must be supervised by responsible adults at all times.

CLEAPSS is an advisory service providing support in practical science and technology. If at all possible, schools should ensure they have membership with CLEAPSS annually and this will enable them to access important ideas, guidance and safe practical ethics. This will also guide schools in how to correctly 'risk assess' their own practical sessions.

**Disclaimer:** CIEC assumes no liability with regard to injuries or damage that may occur as a result of using the information contained in the 'Sustainable Stories and Solutions for Our Planet' publication lesson plans.

# INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY 1: PREPARATORY SURVEY

1 HOUR, PLUS  
15 MINUTES  
AFTER EACH  
ACTIVITY

A survey is carried out by each child to ascertain their thoughts about sustainability as well as their understanding of the impact of their own behaviour in actively bringing about change. Children are encouraged to question family members and compile an overview of current attitudes towards sustainability.

## TYPE OF ENQUIRY

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Survey / Researching using secondary sources

## OBJECTIVES

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Recording data and results of increasing complexity (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

Reporting and presenting findings from enquiries, in oral and written forms such as displays and presentations (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

## SCIENCE VOCABULARY

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Generations, positive, negative, impact, environment.

## RESOURCES PER CHILD

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- Photocopy of **Activity Sheet 1**: Survey plus additional copies to take home
- Pencil or pen

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children will have had experience of asking and answering simple questions to gather information or opinion.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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Explain to the children that they are each going to complete a short survey which contains questions about looking after the Earth and our environment. Discuss with them that this is not a test, it is just to collect their ideas and that there are no right or wrong answers. Discuss with children that they all might have their own ideas and opinions about the questions they are being asked so that it is very important to answer honestly and with as much detail as they can.

Children should be aware that the teacher can read the questions aloud to them, if appropriate and explain any words or questions they do not understand without providing ideas for their answers. If a child is unable to respond, they should write **'I do not know'**. The accuracy of spellings is not important at this stage and there could be a time limit of thirty minutes for completion of the questionnaire, although some children might not need the full amount of time.

Once the survey has been completed, it would be interesting for children to compare their ideas and opinions. Children might also take copies of the survey home for family members to complete and then a wider range of responses can be compared, with a focus on differences and similarities across generations.

# Activity Sheet 1: Survey

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Complete this survey as honestly as you can. It would be interesting for you to ask family members too. Compare your answers with what other people think.

1. How important do you think it is that we look after the Earth and make sure that it is left in a good state for future generations?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why do you think this?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What things do you know about that can have a harmful effect on the Earth?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What things can we do to help the Earth?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What do you do at school/work to help look after the Earth for future generations?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do you do at home to help look after the Earth for future generations?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What else do you think you could do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What changes could you make to your own behaviour to help to look after the Earth for future generations?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What jobs do you know about where people make a positive impact on the environment?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What jobs do you know about where people are causing damage to the environment?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. If you were Prime Minister, what rule or law would you introduce to help us to look after the Earth?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY 2: ENVIRONMENTAL VOCABULARY

30 MINUTES +  
15 MINUTES  
AFTER  
SUBSEQUENT  
ACTIVITIES

Children are challenged to create a 'big-book' style environmental dictionary which will help others in their school to learn about important environmental issues. They suggest definitions for a list of words provided and then, later, refer to the **Glossary** and return to the task to make amendments as they learn more about environmental issues in subsequent activities.

### TYPE OF ENQUIRY

Grouping and classifying things / Researching using secondary sources

### OBJECTIVES

Recording data and results of increasing complexity (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

Reporting and presenting findings from enquiries, in oral and written forms such as displays and presentations (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

### SCIENCE VOCABULARY

See full vocabulary list contained in the activity on **Activity Sheet 2**

### RESOURCES

per child

- Photocopy of **Activity Sheet 2**: Environmental vocabulary
- Later reference to **Activity Sheet 3**: Glossary
- Pencil or pen

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

Children will have had experience of asking and answering simple questions to gather information or opinion.

### ACTIVITY NOTES

Show children the newspaper headline shown below.

#### Dictionary names 'single-use' as the phrase of the year

There is a rising concern of how much plastic we use once and then throw away. This year has seen huge numbers of businesses pledging to phase out single-use plastics from their operations. Some governments are preparing to ban plastic straws, cotton buds, and other single-use plastics...

Discuss the information provided and describe how, each year, several dictionary companies compile a list of new and popular words that reflect the times we are living in. They have named 'single-use' as the phrase of the year and say that this phrase has been used four times as much over the past twelve months as it has ever before.

Explain to children that they are going to create a 'big-book' style environmental dictionary which will help other children in their school to learn about important environmental issues. There are so many new words and phrases that have appeared in our language over recent years, it is important that young people have a good understanding of what they mean.

Share the list of words on **Activity Sheet 2**. Ask if children can suggest definitions, without carrying out any initial research. They should write their ideas directly onto the sheet under each word provided.

Explain that they will return to the task on completion of the activities in this publication. It will be interesting to see how much additional detail children can include in order to improve their final definitions for the finished dictionary.

Children may also wish to compare their final definitions with those provided in the **Glossary (Activity Sheet 3)**.

## Activity Sheet 2: Environmental Vocabulary

Do you know what the words or phrases in the list below mean? Write your ideas under each word provided. You can return to the task later to make any changes or improvements.

acid rain	electric vehicle	going green	recycle / re-use
carbon footprint	emissions	greenhouse gases	pollution
climate change	environmental impact	landfill	precious metals
degradable	fossil fuels	microplastics	single-use
eco-friendly	global warming	non-renewable	sustainable

## Activity Sheet 3: Glossary

acid rain	Water droplets that are acidic due to pollution in the air
carbon footprint	The total amount of carbon dioxide or methane gas you produce per year in your everyday life
climate change	The changes in different environments (temperature, rainfall, cloud cover etc) as a result of global warming
degradable	Able to break down in the environment naturally, or rot away over time
eco-friendly	Least harmful to the environment
electric vehicle	Vehicle with an electric motor powered by electricity from batteries
emissions	Created, given out or flowing from
environmental impact	Any change to the environment, either positive or negative
fossil fuels	A natural, non-renewable fuel, such as coal or gas, formed millions of years ago from the remains of living things
global warming	The processes that cause the average temperature of the Earth to rise
going green	Changing the way you live to help the environment for the better
greenhouse gases	Gases in the air that trap heat from the Sun, so the hot gases stay close to the Earth
landfill	Getting rid of waste material by burying it
microplastics	Very tiny pieces of plastic that pollute the environment
non-renewable	A fixed amount that cannot be replaced
recycle / re-use	To make something new out of something that has been used before To use for the same or a different purpose, something that has been used before
pollution	Any gas, liquid or solid that makes the Earth dirty, poisonous or unhealthy for living things
precious metals	Natural metals of high value that do not react compared to other metals
single-use	Designed to be used once and then thrown away or destroyed
sustainable	To keep it going or available for future generations

# 1. SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS: WHICH METAL?

2-3 HOURS

Children discuss the properties of a range of everyday materials before focusing their attention on different types of metal and their uses. They investigate how metals can corrode when exposed to substances in the environment and that rusting is one type of corrosion. Children are introduced to the properties and uses of precious metals and consider how one company uses these to reduce the amount of dangerous gases emitted by high numbers of vehicles on our roads today.

## TYPE OF ENQUIRY

Observing changes over time / Carrying out comparative and fair tests

## OBJECTIVES

Give reasons, based on evidence from comparative and fair tests, for the particular uses of everyday materials, including metals, wood and plastic (Year 5 Properties and changes of materials)

Explain that some changes result in the formation of new materials, and that this kind of change is not usually reversible, including changes associated with burning and the action of acid on bicarbonate of soda (Year 5 Properties and changes of materials)

Planning different types of scientific enquiries to answer questions, including recognising and controlling variables where necessary (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

## SCIENCE VOCABULARY

materials, metal, precious metals, sustainable, corrode, rust, catalytic converter

## RESOURCES

per group of 4, unless otherwise stated

### Activity 1a:

- 1 set of metal discs or testing strips from an educational supplier or a range of objects made from different metals, e.g. steel paper clips, fine steel wool pads, steel washers, copper plated coins, iron nails, aluminium foil
- 4 shallow containers, such as saucers or petri dishes containing water
- Magnet
- Industry sustainability story: Presentation

## Activity 1b:

- 4 fine steel wool pads
- Resources requested from individual groups might include mild white vinegar or salt
- **Activity Sheet 1:** grid photocopied onto clear acetate sheet
- 4 pairs of disposable non-latex gloves
- 4 shallow containers, such as saucers or petri dishes containing water
- 4 safety glasses (if using acidic solutions)
- Industry sustainability story: **Presentation**
- 4 lab coats or aprons

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children will have compared and grouped materials, focusing on similarities and differences.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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**Introduction:** Start with a game, in which the teacher names an object (e.g. bag) and the children suggest materials from which it could be made. The game is a great way for children to think about how the same object can be made from different material, such as a bag, which can be made out of paper, plastic or fabric, and also how an object can be a composite of materials, such as scissors which can have metal blades and plastic handles.

Progress to focusing on objects made from different types of metals, for example: kitchen foil or drinks cans are commonly made from aluminium, electrical wiring is often made from copper, scissors and cutlery can be made from stainless steel. Ask how many metals the children can name and then discuss why different types of metal are useful for different things.

**Presentation Slide 1:** Ask children if they think metal is a sustainable material. This means that the availability of metal 'meets our current needs without having a negative effect on the needs of future generations'. Explain that, once manufactured, metal can be recycled and used repeatedly. Many people believe that non-renewable resources used to make metals, like minerals and fossil fuels, are not being used-up because the metal can be used again, and this makes it sustainable. Children discuss whether they agree with this or not.

**Presentation Slide 2:** Introduce children to the idea of *precious* metals and explain that these are naturally occurring metals of high value. Discuss that many properties of precious metals do not change under different conditions, for example, they can be shaped without losing toughness and, even at very high temperatures, they do not corrode or rust. Because of this, precious metals are often used to make jewellery. Common precious metals are gold, silver and platinum. Encourage children to research and name any other, lesser known, precious metals.

Ask children to consider how the environment can affect some metals, such as the damage caused when metals corrode. Discuss how corroded metals change, often in colour, and become weaker. Explain that rusting is a type of corrosion and think about different examples of some types of metals rusting such as car bodies and exhaust systems, nails, screws, metal gates, etc. Children could carry out a 'rust hunt' around the school, listing the rusting objects and (possibly) what they are made from. This will aid the process of making predictions about which materials may rust, based on their knowledge of everyday objects.

**Note:** the teacher might wish to check that there are, or even 'plant', rusty things to find prior to the hunt.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 1a: WHICH METALS RUST?

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The original activity and comprehensive background information can be found in Activity 1 of: <http://www.ciec.org.uk/pdfs/resources/water-for-industry.pdf>

Provide small groups of children with a range of objects made from different metals or commercial test discs/strips (see resources above).

Children could place the metal objects in shallow containers, such as saucers or petri dishes, with just enough water poured in to almost cover each object. Over several days, children should observe carefully which objects start to show signs of rust and which do not. They could use a magnet to identify metal items that contain iron or steel.

Children should observe signs of the reddish-brown iron oxide that we know as rust on objects made from iron or metals that contain iron – such as steel. They should begin to form conclusions that both air and water are needed for this to happen. See **Background Information below**.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 1b: RUST DETECTIVES

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To learn more about the corrosion of iron and how salt affects rusting, visit Activity 6 of: <http://www.ciec.org.uk/pdfs/resources/pinch-of-salt.pdf>

Once the children have discovered that several metals do corrode over time, and that the term 'rust' is only used for iron and its alloys, such as steel, and that this is due to a reaction with oxygen in the air and water, they should be encouraged to develop further questions about rusting. Examples include:

- Can iron and steel rust where there is little or no water?
- Does pollution in rainwater speed up rust?
- Do the salty roads in winter or salt spray from the sea make cars rust faster?
- Can I prevent iron or steel from rusting?

Children then plan and carry out a test to answer one of these questions. They should choose a good test material from the previous activity (such as fine steel wool pads) and give reasons for this choice. They could compare a control pad with either one dampened with water, one with saltwater or one with a mixture of water and mild white vinegar (acid). They could examine the pads at regular intervals such as each day over the period of a week and take photographs and measurements of changes over time.

One method of measuring the rusting is to hold a centimetre square grid (on an acetate sheet or tracing paper) above each pad and count the number of squares through which rusting is visible. A square grid is provided on **Activity Sheet 1** for this purpose. Children may have other ideas, such as taking a sequence of photographs, or collecting rust that they shake or scrape off their test material or observing colour changes of the liquids in each container.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Corrosion is the damage caused to materials such as metal and stone when they react to substances in the environment. Stone statues can be damaged by harmful gases in the air, or when they are transformed and carried in 'acid' rain.

'Rusting' is the term given to the corrosion of metals containing iron, e.g. steel, when in contact with water and air. The metal reacts with the oxygen in the air to form a metal oxide. It is impossible to stop corrosion, but it can be controlled.

Precious metals are unique in many ways. They are relatively non-reactive, so they will not rust or explode when exposed to different substances or high temperatures.

The eight precious metals are gold, silver, platinum, palladium, rhodium, ruthenium, iridium and osmium. Gold and silver are probably the best known for their use as high value currency, silver wear and jewellery.

In recent years, silver has seen an increased demand for industrial uses, mainly photography, photovoltaic (solar) cells and batteries as well as medicine (wound dressings, creams, and as an antibiotic coating on medical devices) and hygiene (clothing additives and colloidal silver in after shaves). Gold is used in electronic components because of its high conductivity and resistance to corrosion. While the use of gold has decreased in dental applications, some new markets such as catalysts and pharmaceutical drugs have emerged.

Small amounts of platinum, palladium and rhodium are used in catalytic converters and electronic devices (only a few grams per car). However, the total volume of car sales is large and increasing, as the global economy continues to improve. With a rising need to reduce pollution by promoting electric vehicles, platinum and palladium may also be needed in hybrid cars.

## EXTENSION OR HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Discuss with children how it is important to recycle objects made from metal. Recycling is better for our environment as it uses much more energy to extract metals from the ground than it does to recycle them. Metal can be re-melted and reshaped into new products many times. Explain how even rusted metal can be recycled and reused once the oxygen has been removed.

A fun way to see how corrosion can be removed is to investigate what happens to old coins when they are rubbed with acidic substances, such as vinegar, lemon juice or even cola. Children should investigate with different types of coins to see whether some metals corrode more or less than others, for example copper coins can be made shiny again, while silver coins are visually unchanged.

Remind children that our coins do not technically 'rust' as they are not made from iron, however, the metal does corrode over time, and show a dull colour, due to contact with oxygen and water.

## QUESTIONS FOR THINKING

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- Why do we make so many objects from metal?
- What are precious metals and how are they useful to us?
- Do you agree that metal is a sustainable material? Why do you think this?
- Why is it important to recycle objects made from metal?
- Why do you think steel wool pads are a good test material for rusting?
- Why do we not make expensive jewellery from iron or steel?
- Which material would you choose for a pipeline? Why?
- Why do we paint steel bridges?

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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Children should be particularly careful when handling metal objects and fine steel wool because they may have sharp edges or corners. They should protect their eyes from acidic solutions, such as vinegar, by wearing safety glasses and refrain from rubbing their eyes during investigations. They should also protect their clothes with lab coats or appropriate aprons. Encourage children to wear disposable non-latex gloves and wash their hands thoroughly to avoid any skin irritations. After completing the investigations, children should clean up responsibly.

## INDUSTRY LINKS AND AMBASSADORS

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Ambassadors visiting the classroom could bring samples of metals and metal equipment and talk about how metal is used on site or for important industrial processes. The ambassador can discuss the sustainability of metal in terms of how metal is made, used, reused or recycled on their sites and to give examples where alternative materials to metal are used.

To enable children to explore one company's use of precious metals to solve the problem of dangerous car emissions polluting our atmosphere, teachers and children should follow the slides on the presentation **Sustainable materials: which metal?** and engage in discussion points and activities to develop a further understanding of industrial contexts.

## CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

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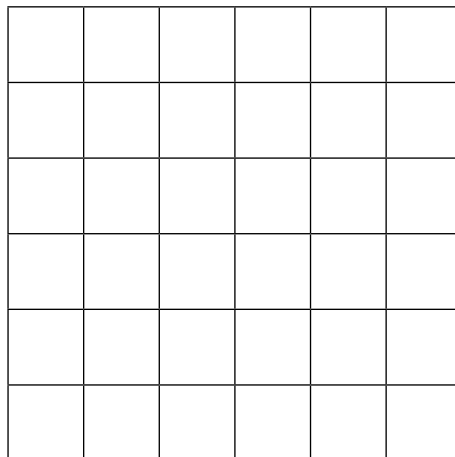
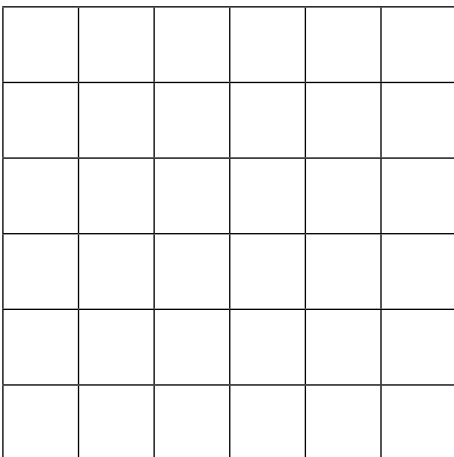
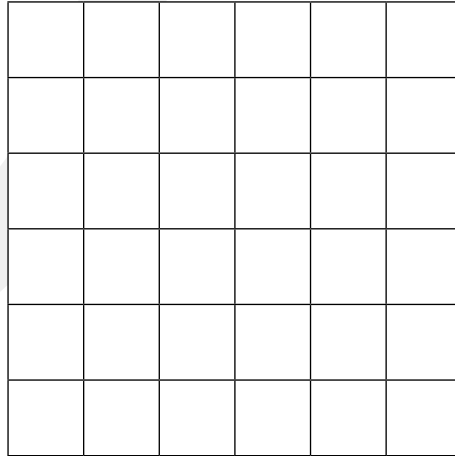
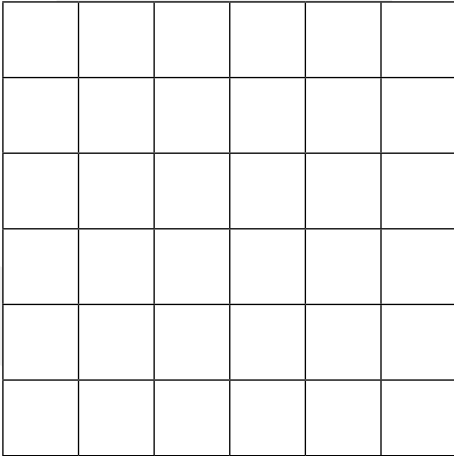
**Mathematics:** There is an opportunity to measure and compare the area of rusting / corrosion using grids.

**PSHE:** to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events that are of concern to them and offer their recommendations to appropriate people; to learn that they have different kinds of responsibilities, rights and duties at home, at school, in the community and towards the environment; to continue to develop the skills to exercise these responsibilities.

# Activity Sheet 4

The grids are for measurement of the area rusted on steel wool pads or similar metal objects.

Photocopy the grids onto clear acetate sheets to use.



Each square on the grid has an area of one square centimetre.

*(When printing this page do not check the box "fit to page")*

## 2. SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS: WHICH PLASTIC?

1–2 HOURS

Children discuss the properties of a range of everyday materials before focusing their attention on different types of plastic and their uses. They are challenged to identify and name unknown plastics by observing what happens when samples are placed in different liquids and when a force is applied. Children learn about the impact that plastics can have on the environment and why it is important to recycle plastic items. They consider how one company supports a recycling scheme to reduce the amount of a certain type of plastic that is usually used once and sent to landfill sites.

The original activity and comprehensive background information can be found on pages 3–6 of <http://www.ciec.org.uk/resources/plastics-playtime.html>.

### TYPE OF ENQUIRY

Grouping and classifying things / Carrying out comparative and fair tests

### OBJECTIVES

Give reasons, based on evidence from comparative and fair tests, for the particular uses of everyday materials, including metals, wood and plastic (Year 5 Properties and changes of materials)

Use and develop classification keys and other information records to identify, classify and describe materials (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

### SCIENCE VOCABULARY

plastic, properties, single-use, fossil fuels, non-renewable, landfill, recycling, non-degradable

### RESOURCES

per group of 4, unless otherwise stated

- **ONE OF EACH FOR WHOLE CLASS:** example plastic objects, e.g. Christmas card packaging (PVC), milk carton (polythene), yoghurt pot/hot drinks cup lid (polystyrene), pizza base/insulated foam cup (expanded polystyrene)
- 1 x 1-litre measuring jug (or bowl of similar capacity)
- 1 teaspoon
- **Activity Sheet 2:** Identifying Plastics Key
- 1 small bowl of salt
- Plastics pieces – 1 sample of PVC, polythene, polystyrene and expanded polystyrene cut to approximately 8cm x 1cm. The strips are then numbered 1 to 4 with a permanent marker.
- 4 safety glasses and 4 pairs of disposable non-latex gloves
- Industry sustainability story: **Presentation**

**Important note:** As it is not certain that an object is made from a specific plastic it is imperative that the **teacher checks the identity and tests** selected items before presenting the activity to the children. Often, the recycling number or code is printed on everyday plastic objects. Teachers are looking for: 2 (HDPE) or 4 (LDPE) for polystyrene, 3 (PVC or V) for PVC and 6 (PS) for each type of polystyrene, however expanded polystyrene will be the foam version. Do not share this information with children until the end of the activity.

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children will have compared and grouped materials, focusing on similarities and differences.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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**Introduction:** A game of 'Jeopardy,' where the answer is provided and children work in small groups to suggest what the question might be, would be a fun starter activity to recap what they already know about a range of everyday materials. For example, the teacher says, 'The answer is wood,' and the children must phrase their response in the form of a relevant question, such as 'Which material comes from trees?' or 'What can a pencil, desk and drum sticks be made from?' Finish the game with the answer of 'plastic' and discuss the various questions suggested by the class.

Discuss how there are many different types of plastic and that each one is useful for different things. Ask the children to name as many different types of plastic as they can and collect responses. Refer to Lesson 1: 'which metal?' and consider how we know of metals in everyday use but often struggle to identify different types of plastic. Children may be familiar with names of plastics in specific contexts such as shopping with polythene bags or sitting on bean-bags filled with polystyrene beads.

Discuss how many types of plastic begin with the prefix 'poly' and can have very tricky long names so are often abbreviated. Give the examples of polythene (or polyethylene) (PE), polystyrene (PS), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET) or polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

Ask children if they think plastics are sustainable materials. Discuss how plastics are made from materials found in fossil fuels which are non-renewable and so will eventually run out. Children might also talk about how plastic is often thrown away after one use and can end up in landfill sites or as litter pollution. Focus the discussion on how important it is for us to consider the sustainability of the products we use and how plastics can be reused and recycled. It is important that we can sort plastic items by type and ensure that they are not just used once and then thrown away.

Show four everyday plastic objects (see Resource list for suggestions) and explain that each object is made from a different type of plastic, with different properties. Challenge children to suggest how we can identify each type of plastic in order to help us make decisions about plastic recycling.

Children could attempt to name the examples provided because of the colour or texture and similarity to objects that they already know. They should begin to realise the difficulty in identifying plastics simply by appearance, and the idea of investigating different properties can be introduced.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 2a: SINK FLOAT TEST

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Children work in small groups and are given four samples of plastic (numbered 1-4) to represent each of the example objects. Explain to children that they should half fill a jug with water and place each sample piece under the water before letting it go. They should observe and record which samples of plastic float and why they think this might be (the pieces of polythene and expanded polystyrene will float).

Children should then add salt to the water, a teaspoon at a time, stirring after each addition, then observe and record which plastic sample begins to rise and which sample stays at the bottom of the jug and why they think this has happened. (The piece of polystyrene will begin to rise and will float after 2-3 teaspoons of salt have been added. The piece of PVC will stay at the bottom.)

Explain to children that by observing what a plastic sample does when placed in various liquids, different types of plastic can be identified, and this technique can be used to sort plastics during the recycling process.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 2b: CREASE TEST

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Using the same samples (removed from the water), children should attempt to fold a crease in each of the four plastic pieces. They should observe and record whether each sample either snaps, creases or shows signs of stress whitening (the plastic becomes white along the line of stress where the material structure is altered).

For reference only, the results are usually:

- Snaps – thick PVC, expanded polystyrene
- Crease – polythene
- Creases with stress whitening – polystyrene, thin PVC and some polythene

Using their own results, groups should have enough information to use the classification key provided on **Activity Sheet 2** to identify and name each of the unknown plastics. They should then relate this information to which type of plastic each of the example objects are made from so that they can be appropriately recycled.








## EXTENSION OR HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Discuss with children that, in order to identify the type of plastic that an object is made from, it would be impractical to see whether it floats or sinks or can be creased! Ask if anyone knows of another way to help us to identify which plastic an object is made from. Explain that many plastic items that can be recycled have a symbol like the one shown here.



Show lots of examples of plastic items (or children could be challenged to find these in the home) and allow time for children to locate this information and work out what the abbreviations or numbers might mean. They should then use what they have found out to sort and group a range of different plastic items according to plastic type. It would be interesting for children to find out which materials and types of plastics can be recycled near to where they live.

	polyethylene terephthalate	Water bottles, soft and fizzy drink bottles, pots, tubs, oven ready trays.
	high-density polyethylene	Toys, picnic ware, household and kitchenware, cable insulation, carrier bags, food wrapping material.
	polyvinyl chloride	Window frames, drainage pipes, medical devices, blood storage bags, flooring, vehicle interiors and seat coverings, fashion and footwear, packaging, cling film, credit cards.
	low density polyethylene	Squeeze bottles, toys, carrier bags, insulation, tank linings, heavy duty sacks, general packaging, gas and water pipes.
	polypropylene	Bottle caps, cereal liners, lunch boxes, ketchup bottles, packing tape, straws.
	polystyrene	Toys and novelties, rigid packaging, refrigerator trays and boxes, cosmetic packs, CD cases.
	other types of plastics	Baby bottles, water cooler bottles, car parts.

Source: [https://www.bpf.co.uk/sustainability/plastics\\_recycling.aspx](https://www.bpf.co.uk/sustainability/plastics_recycling.aspx)

## QUESTIONS FOR THINKING

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- How can you tell plastics from other materials?
- Are all plastics the same? What similarities and differences have you noticed?
- Do you know the names of any plastics?
- Can you find out why many names of plastics begin with 'poly'?
- Why do you think so many things are made from plastic?
- Why is it important to recycle items made from plastic?

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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Safety glasses should be worn during the 'crease test', as small pieces may splinter off the plastics when under stress. The option of wearing gloves would prevent cuts from sharp edges. Dispose of the pieces of plastic by recycling them if possible – do not pour down the sink.

## INDUSTRY LINKS AND AMBASSADORS

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Ambassadors visiting the classroom could bring samples of plastics and plastic equipment to show the children and talk about how plastics are used on site or for important industrial processes. It is interesting to discuss the sustainability of plastics in terms of how plastics are made, used, reused or recycled in industry, and to think about alternative materials to plastics.

To enable children to explore one company's solution to the problem of many plastic items ending up in landfill and the uncertainty of recycling plastics, such as PVC, teachers and children should follow the slides on the presentation Sustainable materials: which plastic? and engage in discussion points and activities to develop a further understanding of industrial contexts.

## CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

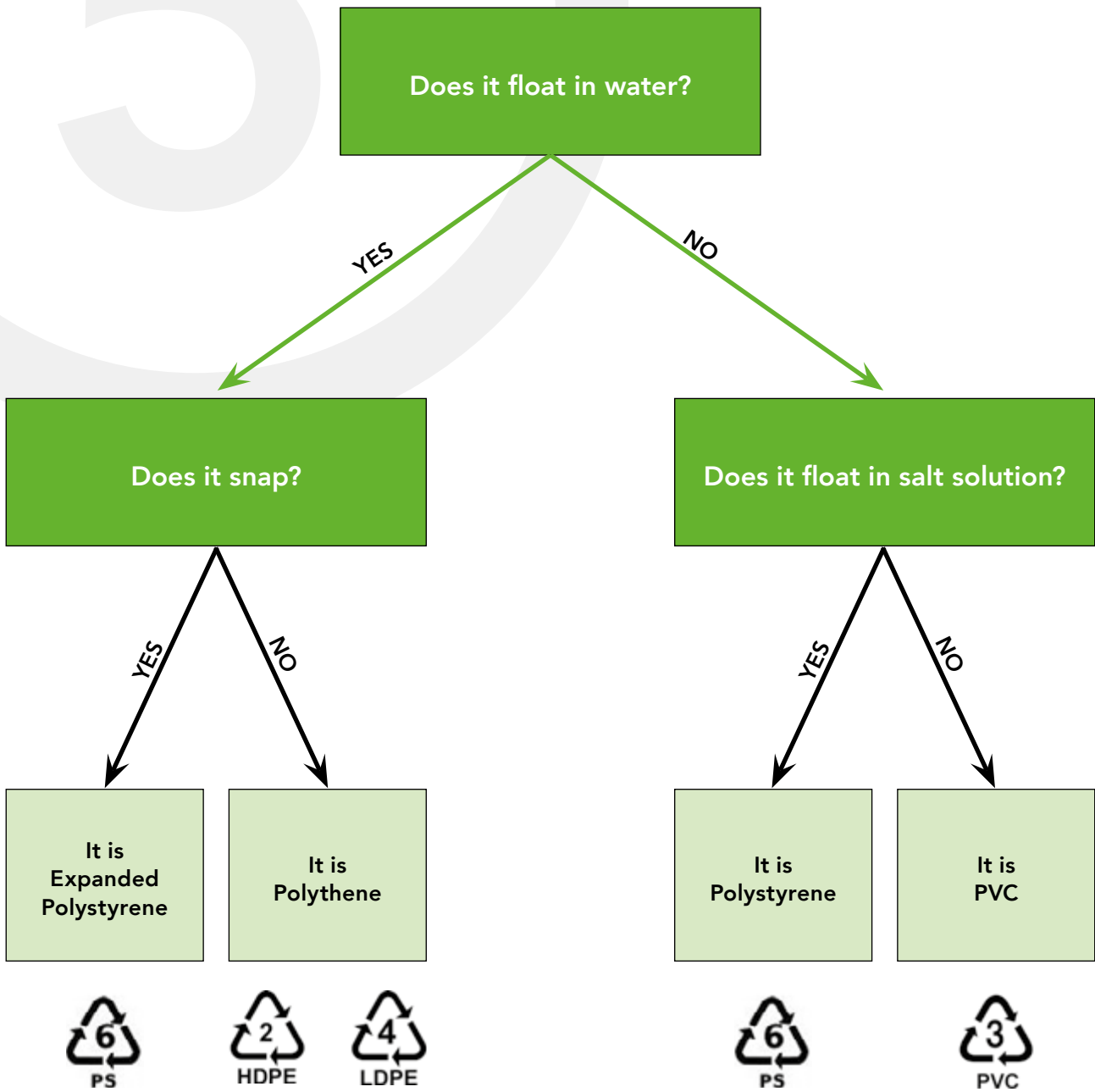
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**Mathematics:** complete, read and interpret information in tables and graphs. Develop keys and other information records to identify, classify and describe.

**PSHE:** to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events that are of concern to them and offer their recommendations to appropriate people; to learn that resources can be allocated in different ways and that these economic choices affect individuals, communities and the sustainability of the environment across the world.

# Activity Sheet 5

## Identifying Plastics Key



### 3. SUSTAINABLE METHODS OF CLEANING: WHICH WASHING PRODUCT?

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2-3 HOURS

Children think about the amount of clothing that they own and discuss different types of clothing for different purposes. They reflect upon how frequently clothing is washed and the impact this might have on the environment. Groups of children plan and carry out their own fair test to investigate how effective different commercial washing products are at removing stains from fabric. They complete the activity by considering how one company has developed an ingredient for a new washing product which washes clothes more effectively than ever so that we do not have to wash or replace them more than we need to.

The original activity and comprehensive background information can be found in the 'What's in washing products?' activity at [http://www.ciec.org.uk/kitchen\\_concoctions/](http://www.ciec.org.uk/kitchen_concoctions/).

#### TYPE OF ENQUIRY

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Carrying out comparative and fair tests.

#### OBJECTIVES

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Give reasons, based on evidence from comparative and fair tests, for the particular uses of everyday materials including metals, wood and plastic (Year 5 Properties and changes of materials)

Demonstrate that dissolving, mixing and changes of state are reversible changes (Year 5 Properties and changes of materials)

Planning different types of scientific enquiries to answer questions, including recognising and controlling variables where necessary (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

#### SCIENCE VOCABULARY

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fabric, landfill, variable, fair test, greenhouse gases, carbon footprint, global warming

## RESOURCES

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per group of 4, unless otherwise stated

- Samples of clothing / different types of fabric (common washable fabrics include cotton, denim, linen, nylon, polyester and lycra),
- 1 teaspoon
- 1 thermometer
- 1 measuring jug
- 4-6 stained samples of white polyester or cotton
- **Activity Sheet 1:** grid photocopied onto clear acetate sheet
- Small samples of three different brands of commercial washing product (powder and liquid and an eco-friendly product),
- Source of warm water (up to 40°C),
- 1 timer
- 1 large bowl
- 4 pairs of disposable non-latex gloves and 4 safety glasses
- **Activity Sheet 3:** Post-it planning template
- Two colours of post-it notes
- Industry sustainability story: **Presentation**

**Note:** pre-prepared fabric samples could be the same size for fair testing. Stain the samples in advance with the same amount of food – do not use foods that stain severely such as tomato sauce. Good examples to include are margarine or mincemeat.

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children should have opportunities to set up simple practical enquiries, comparative and fair tests. They should be able to recognise when a fair test is necessary and contribute to some of the planning for this.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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Introduction: Ask children to think about the amount of clothing that they own and the different types of clothing for different purposes. Children might have a uniform and PE kit for school, clothes for casual wear, special occasions, hobbies, seasonal clothes as well as warm coats, anoraks, jackets, body warmers, not to mention different types of shoes! Allow children time to explore and discuss a range of different types of fabric and which are used for different types of clothing. They might also like to look at labels on the clothing that they are wearing to identify fabric type.

Discuss how often clothing needs to be washed. For some children this might be every time an item has been worn or just when the clothing becomes dirty. Think about how most homes now have automatic washing machines and that modern detergents are considered essential for cleaning clothes. Explain that washing powders, liquids and capsules help break up dirt and stains so that we can wear our clothes repeatedly, rather than throwing them into the rubbish bin and ending up in landfill.

## MAIN ACTIVITY

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Discuss how washing products need to wash our clothes more effectively than ever so that we do not have to rewash or replace our clothes more than we need to. Also by washing clothes at much lower temperatures, we can use less energy. Explain to children that they will be planning and carrying out their own fair test investigation to find out how effective different commercial washing products are at removing stains from fabric.

Each group will be given samples of stained fabric and three different types of washing product (powder, liquid and eco-friendly). Children need to think about how they will test each washing product to observe or measure how well it removes the stain.

Children might like to use the generic **Post-It Planning Template (Activity Sheet 3)** for support in the planning phase by generating a list of variables that they could change and observe/measure. In the case of this investigation, they will be changing the 'washing product' to see how this affects the visibility / size of the stain OR the time taken to remove the stain.

Children should be aware that variables they control could include; the cause of stain, size of stain, type of fabric, size of fabric, amount of washing product, amount of water, temperature of water, number of rubs, time that the fabric remains in the washing solution, number of rinses to fabric after washing, etc.

Groups should spend time making decisions about the equipment they will use, how they will carry out their tests and make careful observations or measurements, as well as the best way to record the test outcomes. Visibility of stain could be an observation based on a 'visibility scale' determined by the children. Size of stain could be obtained by measuring the length of the stain with a ruler or placing a transparent cm<sup>2</sup> grid on top of the fabric (**Activity Sheet 1**) and calculating the area of stain remaining under each test condition.

Children might decide to include a control sample of stained fabric to compare the outcomes of different tests with the original stained material. They can also take photos or make annotated drawings and notes to assist them in the recording process. Once the washing investigations are complete, give children time to discuss and make decisions about their results and, ultimately, formulate an answer to their original enquiry question: Which washing product is the most effective at removing stains from fabric?

## EXTENSION OR HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Children will be interested to research the phrase 'fast fashion' and learn about the increasing demand on clothing companies to deliver frequent new collections inspired by catwalk looks or celebrity styles. They should consider how 'fast fashion' can lead to negative environmental impact, water pollution, the use of toxic chemicals and increasing amounts of fabric waste.

In attempt to combat the problem of 'fast fashion', children might be interested in finding out about commercial products that protect and prolong the lifespan of fabrics, such as Scotchgard™. They could investigate this by 'protecting' clean samples of cotton or polyester with suggested substances such as glue, hair spray or vegetable oil. They could then drip staining liquids such as a diluted food colouring or a flavoured fruit drink onto the fabric and observe how well the substances offered protection.

## QUESTIONS FOR THINKING

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- Why do you think there are so many different types of washing products available to buy?
- What do you think a good washing product should be able to do?
- How can washing our clothes have a negative effect on the environment?
- How well do you think your group controlled variables and carried out fair washing tests?
- If you were repeating the washing tests, what would you do differently and why?
- What other question would you like to investigate?

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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Prior to this activity, check for individuals who may be allergic to ingredients in any of the washing products or foods used to stain fabrics. On the back of many packets for example washing powder, you will find the words 'Danger', 'Keep out of reach of children' or a hazard warning label. Giving the children only minimal quantities of a sample, will reduce risks to an acceptable level, and the products can be used by children safely. Disposable or rubber gloves (non-latex may be required by some children) should be worn to prevent any allergic reactions children may have. As an additional precaution, children might wear safety glasses to prevent the rubbing of washing products into their eyes and warned not to eat or taste any of the products provided. When performing washing tests, hot water from a kettle or water heater should be cooled before use to no more than 50°C and a thermometer used to test this. Care should be taken to avoid splashing water on the skin, even at this temperature, ensuring that any spills are cleaned up immediately and hot water dispensed carefully by an adult.

For more comprehensive safety guidance, provided by CLEAPSS, please log in and go to: <http://primary.cleapss.org.uk/Resource-File/P005-Investigating-soaps-and-detergents.pdf>

## INDUSTRY LINKS AND AMBASSADORS

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Links can be made with the washing powder and detergent industry via local companies and company websites. STEM Ambassadors are volunteers from a wide range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics related jobs across the UK. They offer their time and enthusiasm and can be found via the STEM Learning website at <https://www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors>

Industrial leaders such as Unilever, Procter and Gamble, and Croda provide speciality ingredients for household products including laundry and fabric care. The scientists at these companies are continuously investigating new ways to improve cleaning performance. Each company will have a team of marketing experts whose job is to tell customers about the benefits of choosing their products over others. Children could watch the video clip, 'Marketing the Mixture', at <http://scienceofhealthyskin.org.uk/foam6.htm> and have a go at some marketing for themselves!

To enable children to explore one company's solution to the environmental impact of washing clothes, teachers and children follow the slides on the presentation **Sustainable methods of cleaning: which washing product?** and engage in discussion points and activities to develop a further understanding of industrial contexts.

## CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

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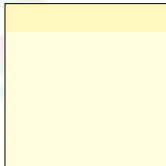
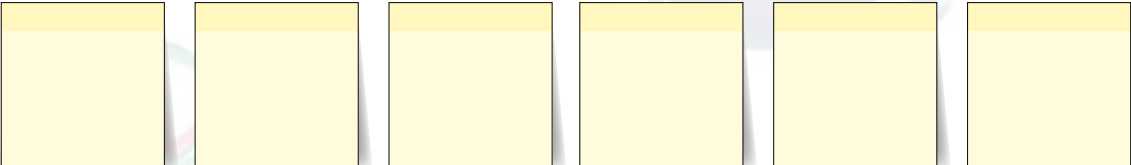
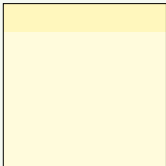


**English:** pupils could draft, edit and produce scripts and poster advertisements for the washing product that performed most favourably in their tests. This kind of creative thinking has excellent links with the genre of persuasive writing in the English curriculum.

**Mathematics:** pupils will use a range of equipment to measure and compare volumes of water and washing products, temperature of water and time taken to remove stains. There is also an opportunity to measure and compare the area of the stains using grids.

**Design and Technology:** pupils could design new packaging for new and improved washing products. They will select from and use a wide range of materials as well as evaluate their functional properties and aesthetic qualities.

**PSHE:** pupils will learn what improves and harms their local, natural and built environments and develop strategies and skills needed to care for these (including conserving energy).

# Activity Sheet 6: Post-it Planning Template

<p><b>We could change</b></p> 	<p><b>We could measure/observe</b></p> 
<p><b>We will change</b></p> 	<p><b>We will measure/observe</b></p> 
<p><b>We will keep these the same...</b></p> 	
<p><b>When I change...</b>  <b>What will happen to?</b> </p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>I think that _____</p> <p>because _____</p>	

## 4. SUSTAINABLE SOURCES OF FOOD: HOW CAN WE GROW OYSTER MUSHROOMS?

2-3 HOURS  
+ DAILY  
OBSERVATIONS

Children learn about the importance of maintaining a healthy and balanced diet and how we should choose the right amount of different types of food from different food groups. They consider the benefits of following a more sustainable diet as an alternative to obtaining meat from animals as a source of protein. The activity culminates in the children being challenged to grow a crop of oyster mushrooms as a sustainable food source before learning about one company's solution to producing protein-rich food in a sustainable way.

### TYPE OF ENQUIRY

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Observing changes over time

### OBJECTIVES

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Identify that humans, including animals, need the right types and amount of nutrition, and that they cannot make their own food; they get nutrition from what they eat (Y3 Animals including humans)

Describe how living things are classified into broad groups according to common observable characteristics and based on similarities and differences, including micro-organisms, plants and animals (Y6 Living things and their habitats)

Recording data and results of increasing complexity using scientific diagrams and labels, classification keys, tables, scatter graphs, bar and line graphs (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

### SCIENCE VOCABULARY

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nutrients, carbohydrates, protein, fungi, livestock, climate change

### RESOURCES

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Commercially available oyster mushroom growing kit (cost at time of publishing is around £5 to £10). To keep costs to a minimum, the whole class might grow oyster mushrooms from one kit. If you wish to try and grow oyster mushrooms without a growing kit, a comprehensive guide and list of equipment can be found at:

**<https://grocycle.com/how-to-grow-oyster-mushrooms/>**.

Industry sustainability story: **Presentation**

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children will know the importance of eating the right amount of different types of food.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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**Introduction:** Discuss with children how eating the right amounts of different types of food provides a range of nutrients to the body and helps us to maintain a healthy diet. Consider different food and drink choices in terms of what children believe to be healthy and unhealthy for us.

Recap how our food and drink can be categorised into five main groups and that food from each group should be eaten in different amounts over a day, or even a week. The teacher could show an image of a healthy plate or food pyramid to illustrate how most of what we eat should come from the two biggest groups: fruit and vegetables, and carbohydrates such as potatoes, bread, cereal, rice and pasta. Discuss how we should eat moderate amounts of protein such as beans, meat, fish and eggs in addition to food and drink from milk and dairy products. The smallest amount of food should come from food high in fat or sugar.

Focus the discussion on how the global population is increasing, so to ensure that there is enough food for future generations, it is important to consider the 'sustainability' of the diets we eat. This means that the impact the production of the food, such as amount of land and water used and the emission of greenhouse gases, has on the environment is limited.

Explain how, with sustainability in mind, many people believe that a healthy diet today should include lots of plant-based foods, especially if the fruits and vegetables we eat are those that are in season and grown locally. Another example of food that can be grown is the oyster mushroom – which is not a plant but a type of fungi from the group of living things that includes microorganisms such as yeasts and moulds. The oyster mushroom is considered to be an extremely healthy, sustainable, source of food, rich in protein and with high levels of vitamins.

## MAIN ACTIVITY: GROW YOUR OWN OYSTER MUSHROOMS

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The simplest way for children to grow their own oyster mushrooms in the classroom is for them to use a commercially available oyster mushroom growing kit. These can be obtained relatively cheaply using an internet search or from a local garden centre. The kits should contain everything you will need, including the growing material (a special compost), mushroom spawn and detailed instructions. The mushrooms often take two to four weeks to grow and then the process can be repeated twice more in order to harvest three crops of oyster mushrooms from the same batch.

Children should be encouraged to keep some form of oyster mushroom growth journal or record of measurements and observations over an extended period. They could include scientific diagrams; photographs or time lapse video as well as written explanations. Through their own observations, they should develop an awareness of the three main phases of growth:

- 1. Inoculation:** Oyster mushroom spawn is mixed with a material such as straw, sawdust, wood pellets, cardboard or coffee grounds. This is called a substrate material and it provides the spawn with essential nutrients for it to grow. The mixture is placed into a suitable container with small holes so that air can come in and out.
- 2. Incubation:** The spawn will grow and spread out across the growing material. When the container is placed in a warm (20-24°C) dark room, such as a cupboard or boiler room, the spawn will eat its way across the food. After 10-14 days, they will grow a full web of white, root-like threads.

- 3. Fruiting:** Once the spawn has spread, it is important to expose it to new conditions in order for the mushrooms to grow. This includes: shaded, low level light, fresh air, humidity (spray with water) and cooler temperatures. Small pins will begin to emerge, which grow out of the container into full size mushrooms.

## EXTENSION OR HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Ask the children if they have any further questions they would like to find answers to as a result of growing oyster mushrooms. They might be interested in finding out what would happen to the growth of mushrooms in different conditions and set up further investigations by changing the original environment in which they have been grown.

## QUESTIONS FOR THINKING

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- Why do you think it is important to eat different amounts of different types of food each day or week?
- Which plant-based food do you enjoy eating?
- Can you explain whether a mushroom is an animal, plant or something else?
- Why is it important to eat food that has been grown locally?
- What do you think to the idea of 'Meat free Monday'? Why do you think this?

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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Some fungi are very poisonous so make sure you obtain the spawn from a reliable source – do not be tempted to gather your own from the countryside. Before and after working with mushrooms, spawn or growing material, ensure that children follow strict hygiene rules by cleaning their hands well with hot soapy water and wiping down all surfaces they are working on with a cleaning spray. Children should not eat during the activity or handle items such as notepads.

We do not advise cooking and eating the mushrooms you have grown. If you decide to, you should follow the guidelines in The ASE booklet *Be safe!* (4th edition), which has a safety code for food hygiene. In addition to this, the 1990 Food Safety Act can be found online.

## INDUSTRY LINKS AND AMBASSADORS

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Links can be made with the food industry via local companies and company websites. STEM Ambassadors are volunteers from a wide range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics related jobs across the UK. They offer their time and enthusiasm and can be found via the STEM Learning website at <https://www.stem.org.uk/stem-ambassadors>

Ambassadors visiting the classroom could bring real samples of food products and their packaging as well as relevant resources to show the various stages of growing alternative plant or fungi-based sources of food. Children might enjoy having a go at 'taste testing' to see whether they can identify alternative versus original products (once dietary/religious restrictions have been confirmed). To enable children to explore one company's solution to the search for more sustainable sources of food, teachers and children should follow the slides on the presentation **Sustainable sources of food: how can we grow oyster mushrooms?** and engage in discussion points and activities to develop a further understanding of industrial contexts.

## CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

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**Mathematics:** measure, compare, add and subtract lengths (m/cm/mm); mass (kg/g); volume/capacity (l/ml)

**PSHE:** to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events that are of concern to them and offer their recommendations to appropriate people; learn that they have different kinds of responsibilities, rights and duties at home, at school, in the community and towards the environment; to continue to develop the skills to exercise these responsibilities

## 5. SUSTAINABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY: WHICH PLANT MATERIAL?

2-3 HOURS

Children learn about what fossil fuels are and how they are used, in particular to make electricity. The discussion focusses on the need for renewable energy and how this can be less harmful to the environment. Children are challenged to carry out two investigations for a fictitious company in order to find a sustainable plant-based source of fuel. They will then learn about a real company's solution to producing energy for heating and electricity from natural, sustainable sources such as plants.

The original activity and comprehensive background information can be found on Activity 2 of <http://www.ciec.org.uk/pdfs/resources/renewables-dont-run-out.pdf>.

### TYPE OF ENQUIRY

Observing changes over time / Carrying out comparative and fair tests

### OBJECTIVES

Compare and group together everyday materials on the basis of their properties (Y5 Properties and changes of materials)

Give reasons, based on evidence from comparative and fair tests, for the particular uses of everyday materials (Y5 Properties and changes of materials)

Explain that some changes result in the formation of new materials, and that this kind of change is not usually reversible, including changes associated with burning and the action of acid on bicarbonate of soda (Y5 Properties and changes of materials)

Reporting and presenting findings from enquiries, including conclusions, causal relationships and explanations of and degree of trust in results, in oral and written forms such as displays and other presentations (UKS2 Working Scientifically)

### SCIENCE VOCABULARY

crude oil, fossil fuel, non-renewable, carbon dioxide, climate change, burn, compressing

### RESOURCES

per class

- 1 large bowl of each: straw, hay, wood shavings/chips
- 1 bucket of sand or water (emergency use)
- timers – 1 per child or pair if possible
- 3 clear sealable plastic bags
- safety glasses
- 3 metal baking trays/roasting tins or similar
- 1 safety lighter (teacher use)
- **Activity Sheet 4** (letter from company)

## RESOURCES

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per group of 4, unless otherwise stated

- Access to straw, hay, wood shavings/chips Note: the plant material must be completely dried
- 1 x 500g food can or 1 x 1kg weight
- Access to push meters of different scales if possible
- **Activity Sheet 3:** Post-it planning template
- 1 x 1000ml jug and 1 circular disc of thick card measured to fit inside of the jug
- Access to weighing scales
- Two colours of post-it notes
- Industry sustainability story: **Presentation**

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE

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Children will have had some experience of setting up simple practical enquiries, comparative and fair tests.

## ACTIVITY NOTES

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**Introduction: Activity Sheet 4** is a letter which introduces the children to a fictitious company and forms the context to both activities in this lesson. Discuss with the children why the company might want to find an alternative fuel to crude oil. Explain that this is a thick, yellowy-black liquid found naturally by drilling down through rocks on land or off-shore. Because it burns very well it is considered to be one of the world's most important fuel sources.

**Presentation slide 2:** Continue the discussion to include how crude oil is called a fossil fuel because it was formed from the remains of animals and plants that lived millions of years ago before the dinosaurs. Over many years, the remains were covered by layers of mud. Heat and pressure from these layers helped the remains turn into what we call oil.

Explain to children that crude oil is a non-renewable fuel as it takes millions of years to form and will eventually run out. (**Presentation slide 3**) Fossil fuels also release carbon dioxide gas into the air when it is burned, and this can contribute towards climate change. Discuss how it is important that we find new, environmentally friendly, sources of fuel for things like heating and making electricity.

Focus the discussion on how the population of the world is increasing, so to ensure that there will be enough energy for future generations, it is important to consider the 'sustainability' of the sources we use.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 1: WHICH PLANT MATERIAL BURNS BEST?

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Firstly, children are going to generate ideas for how they can compare samples of straw, hay and wood shavings/chips to find out which plants are best for the company to burn in their boiler. Each group should discuss what being 'best' means, e.g. burns for the longest, brightest flame etc. Post-it planning template (**Activity Sheet 3**) can be used to generate ideas at this stage, before collating suggestions as a whole class. The best aspects of each group's plans can be combined to provide the teacher demonstration.

The children can be involved in several aspects of the practical activity, such as: measuring equal amounts of plant material, emptying the measured material into a metal tray ready for testing, photographing and filming the process, measuring and recording close observations such as the duration of burning, flame type, smoke produced etc., creating a commentary.

The amount of ash and burnt material can be collected and, once cool, could be put into a clear plastic bag and used for display purposes. It could also be weighed and compared to the weight of the plant material at the start. Discuss why there may be a difference and what has happened to the plant material during the burning, i.e. an irreversible change.

## SAMPLE BURNING RESULTS

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hay	Takes time to ignite, smoulders rather than burns, produces a lot of smoke, and does not burn out completely.
straw	Burns readily, produces little smoke, quickly burns itself out, and leaves very little ash.
wood shavings/ chips	Ignite readily, produce little smoke, burn slowly but steadily and leaves ash.

Ask groups of children to consider what their findings tell them, and which burning properties would be attractive to a company. They will hopefully conclude that the company would be looking for a plant material that burns slowly and cleanly with little smoke and produces small amounts of ash.

## MAIN ACTIVITY 5b: WHICH PLANT MATERIAL CAN BE STORED MOST EASILY?

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Each group is given samples of the straw, hay and wood shavings/chips to observe and handle. Children should think about how large quantities of plant material would take up a lot of space and so would be inefficient to transport and store. They should refer back to the original letter and discuss why many deliveries by lorry would not be an environmentally friendly solution to the problem.

Small groups should explore the effect of compressing the dried plant material, e.g. How can we reduce the space (volume) it takes up? Does compressing change the weight? Does it make it easier to transport? Could the compressed material be used for anything else?

Using the questions above, small groups of children should plan their test and choose resources needed to carry it out. The interactive planning tool or post-it planning template (**Activity Sheet 3**) can be used to help limit the independent variable to one (the plant material) and maintain fair test conditions. Dependent variables to consider include the amount of plant material, the method of compressing, length of time of compression, the method of measuring compression.

The following process provides one possible way to investigate the changes taking place and suggested method of collecting data:

1. Fill a jug with plant material up to the 1000ml line (be careful not to compress any of the material).
2. Place the circular card disc on top of the plant material and ensure that it lies exactly on the 1000ml measurement line (you might need to add more plant material or remove some).
3. Weigh the filled jug.
4. Compress the material using weights (a heavy food can will work well) or by pushing down an agreed force using a push-meter for an agreed amount of time.
5. Remove the weights/stop pushing and note the new volume of the plant material using the scale on the jug.
6. Re-weigh the jug.

Each group should report their findings on the compression of the dried plant materials, explaining what they have found out with respect to mass and volume, and possibly density – when material is squashed to make it smaller, it weighs the same but becomes more dense.

Discuss the idea that reducing the volume of the plant material by compressing it will reduce the number of vehicles required to transport it. By producing briquettes, small compressed packs of material, it is easier to handle and transport and will be in a form that can be used easily when adding to the boiler.

Children should combine their findings from the compression investigation with their observations made during the burning activity, and then make final decisions regarding which plant material would make the best sustainable source of fuel for the company.

## EXTENSION OR HOME-BASED ACTIVITIES

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Children might like to draft and produce a letter to the company in order to make their final recommendations. They could include data and results from their investigations in an appropriate format as additional evidence to support their conclusions.

Children might also be interested to research other forms of renewable energy and how these are created. They could look for solar powered items around the home, such as calculators, garden lights or roof panels. They may live near to wind turbines and could find out more about what they are and what they do.

## QUESTIONS FOR THINKING

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- How do the plant materials compare to the most common fuels; gas, electricity, coal and oil?
- Can the waste products be used for other purposes? (e.g. ash can be used to manufacture concrete and be used as fertilizer.)
- What problems could there be in transporting enough dried plant material to the company to keep the boiler going?
- What difficulties might there be with storing large quantities of plant material on site?
- Why might it be more convenient to convert fuel to electricity and supply it through a cable rather than burn the fuels on site?

## SAFETY GUIDANCE

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The burning investigation is a teacher-led practical activity and the following safety precautions must be taken:

Carry out the activity in the open-air (middle schools may have a fume cupboard) or liaise with the local secondary school. Only burn small samples of plant materials and have a bucket of sand or water close by for use as an extinguisher, if necessary. Only supervising adults should extinguish flames, not children. The teacher should wear safety goggles and have long hair tied back. Be aware of the weather conditions so that the children are not downwind of the activity and are out of the way of any smoke produced or any material which may get blown about. Check for children who may have allergies to plant material and ensure that children who have asthma have ready access to their inhalers.

For more comprehensive safety guidance, provided by CLEAPSS, please log in and go to: <http://primary.cleapss.org.uk/Resource-File/P018-Investigating-burning.pdf>

## INDUSTRY LINKS AND AMBASSADORS

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Ambassadors visiting the classroom could talk about how they produce heat and electricity for their site, what targets they have set themselves and what they are doing to be more environmentally friendly. Children will be interested to hear about job roles including Environmental Officer. Some companies have introduced initiatives such as: electric vehicles for staff, energy saving lighting installed in all offices as well as using landfill gases as a source of energy. Some companies have won awards or special recognition for aspects of sustainability and it is important for the children to hear stories of positive environmental impact.

To enable children to explore one company's solution to the search for more sustainable sources of food, teachers and children should follow the slides on the presentation **Sustainable sources of energy: which plant material?** and engage in discussion points and activities to develop a further understanding of industrial contexts.

## CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

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**English:** identify the audience for and purpose of the writing, select the appropriate form and use other similar writing as models for their own. Plan their writing by noting and developing initial ideas, drawing on reading and research where necessary.

**Mathematics:** estimate, compare and calculate different measures.

**PSHE:** learn what improves and harms their local, natural and built environments and develop strategies and skills needed to care for these (including conserving energy); learn that resources can be allocated in different ways and that these economic choices affect individuals, communities and the sustainability of the environment across the world.

## Activity Sheet 7

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Dear Scientists

Our company makes ingredients used in many different products, ranging from soap and body wash to kitchen cleaners. We want to ensure our products do as little damage to the environment as possible and would like your help with this.

We were wondering if we could burn dried plants instead of crude oil in our boiler to produce steam for heating and making electricity for use on our site.

Things we think we could burn, available from local companies, include straw, hay and wood shavings but we are not sure which one would be best to use.

The oil we currently use is delivered to us by pipeline with little or no disruption. We are worried that we would need very large quantities of plant material and we do not have enough room to store it on site.

Also, we would need many lorries every day to bring the plant materials on to our site. This will be very expensive for us and result in a lot of extra traffic on the roads.

We would like you to carry out some tests and provide us with evidence to help us make some difficult decisions. Any extra research you can do would also be very useful to us.

Yours faithfully



**Susan Carlton**  
Environmental Manager








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