**AIR POLLUTION IN MEXICO CITY**

One of the most important environmental issues facing Latin America is the problem of air pollution. It is an important problem in many cities, but the biggest challenges occur in Mexico City, Mexico.

 Mexico is a huge city and home to many people. It has industrialized very quickly, and the many factories continuously release poisonous gases into the air, damaging the atmosphere. The people who drive cars around the city contribute to this problem because of the emissions produced by their cars.

The overcrowding in the city only makes it worse, because Mexico City is surrounded by slums that continue to grow. With so many people, the Mexican government has a hard time keeping up with air pollution, cleaning water, and disposing of trash and other waste.

 Mexico City is located at the base of the Sierra Madre Mountains, which cover a large part of Mexico. This location makes the air pollution even more dangerous. The mountains trap all of the gases from the cars and factories so they cannot get out, and they cover the city with a thick haze of fog and chemicals called smog. Some people wear masks when they go to work or school to protect themselves from the dangerous gases.

 The air pollution in Mexico City is very dangerous. It kills plants, damages the ozone layer, and makes people sick, either by breathing in the chemicals or by eating food that has been poisoned. It also contributes to a problem with acid rain. Many of Mexico’s beautiful and ancient monuments have been destroyed by acid rain, which eats away the stone.

 To solve this problem, Mexico must take steps to cut down on the amount of gases it releases into the atmosphere. One important way they are doing this is to restrict the number of people allowed to drive in Mexico City. The government hopes that this will help people’s health and take away some of the ugly smog that covers the city and ruins its historical sites.

**DEFORESTATION**

Although environmental problems exist on every continent in the world, few regions have received as much attention as Latin America, and in particular the destruction of the rainforest surrounding the Amazon River. This forest, which covers parts of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, is the largest rainforest in the world.

 By 1994, 15 years ago, twenty thousand square kilometers of rainforest had already been destroyed. If people keep destroying land at this rate, the entire forest may have disappeared by 2100. Other smaller forests throughout Central America and the Caribbean are also at risk.

 There are two main concerns with the destruction of the rainforest. First, rainforests take in large amounts of carbon dioxide and release oxygen, cleaning the air and reducing the effects of global warming. Second, the plant and animal species that live in the rainforest represent a large fraction of the world’s total number of plants and animals. If their homes are destroyed, they will die.

 Still, humans continue to destroy the rainforests: for homes, for farming, for ranching, or for the wood to sell both in Latin America and around the world. Although everyone agrees on the importance of protecting the rainforest, it is hard to convince people to stop trying to make money from the land. Huge efforts to educate people about the rainforest and cut down on deforestation have had some success, but not enough.

**OIL POLLUTION**

One of the most valuable natural resources a country can have is oil. In Latin America, the country with the most oil and natural gas deposits is Venezuela. Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the Western Hemisphere (North and South America) and supplies the US with 15% of our oil and natural gas.

 The valuable oil significantly helps the economy of Venezuela, but it is very dangerous for the country’s environment. Taking oil out of the ground pollutes the air, releasing harmful carbon dioxide and increasing the problem of global warming.

 Oil is most dangerous to the water on the coast of Venezuela. When oil is spilled, either when it is being taken out of the ground or when it is transported, it poisons the water supply, making people sick and killing many animals in and around the water. Birds are especially at risk because the oil gets into their feathers and stops them flying.

 To address the problem of oil pollution, Venezuela has started to make its laws about the environment stricter. It has also signed many international agreements about controlling oil and oil spills.