

## Pollution Causing More Deaths Than COVID-19, Action Needed: UN Expert

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Pollution by states and companies is contributing to more deaths globally than COVID-19, a UN environmental report published on Tuesday said, calling for "immediate and ambitious action" to ban some toxic chemicals.

The report said pollution from pesticides, plastics and electronic waste is causing widespread human rights violations as well as at least nine million premature deaths a year, and that the issue is largely being overlooked.

The coronavirus pandemic has caused close to 5.9 million deaths, according to data aggregator Worldometer.

"Current approaches to managing the risks posed by pollution and toxic substances are clearly failing, resulting in widespread violations of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment," the report's author, UN Special Rapporteur David Boyd, concluded.

### Recommendation

Due to be presented next month to the UN Human Rights Council, which has declared a clean environment a human right, the document was posted on the Council's website on Tuesday.

It urges a ban on polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl, man-made substances used in household products such as non-stick cookware that have been linked to cancer and dubbed "forever chemicals" because they don't break down easily.

It also recommends the clean-up of polluted sites and, in extreme cases, the possible relocations of

affected communities - many of them poor, marginalised and indigenous - from so-called "sacrifice zones".

That term, originally used to describe nuclear test zones, was expanded in the report to include any heavily contaminated site or place rendered uninhabitable by climate change.

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet has called environmental threats the biggest global rights challenge, and a growing number of climate and environmental justice cases are invoking human rights with success.