

Chapter Twenty-Five

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

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INTRODUCTION

The technological revolution of the twentieth century has enabled us to alter our environment on a scale never before possible. One inherent danger of living with twentieth century technology is that it may be abused, resulting in rapid, large scale damage to both human populations and remaining natural ecosystems of the Earth. Abuse of nuclear technology is a major source of concern; however, equally formidable environmental disasters may also result from abuse of modern industrial technologies. Three scenarios which may precipitate large-scale environmental damage are war, terrorism, and technological accidents.

This chapter examines significant man-made environmental damage which has resulted and which potentially may result from the Persian Gulf War of 1991. The intent of this chapter is not to belittle the tragedy of lost human lives during fighting of the war, but to point out some environmental problems associated with the war. Such environmental problems are often discounted at the time of war, in the wake of immediate loss of lives; however, in the long term, it may be the environmental problems which accrue the most substantial economic and human costs, including continued loss of lives long after commencement of the war.

Oil Spills

During the week of January 20, 1991, about 1.5 million barrels of oil (63 million gallons) were spilled in the Persian Gulf offshore of Kuwait! The spill was more

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