

Global resource consumption to triple by 2050: UN

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A woman walks past a globe exhibition about combatting global warming and climate change in Copenhagen in 2009. Global consumption of natural resources could triple to 140 billion tons a year by 2050 unless consumer nations take drastic steps, the United Nations warned Thursday.

Global consumption of natural resources could triple to 140 billion tons a year by 2050 unless consumer nations take drastic steps, the United Nations warned Thursday.

A UN environment panel said the world cannot sustain the tearaway rate of use of minerals, ores and fossil and plant fuels. It called on governments to "decouple" [economic growth](#) from the rate of natural resource [consumption](#).

With the [world population](#) expected to hit 9.3 billion by 2050 and

[developing nations](#) becoming more prosperous, the report warned "the prospect of much higher resource consumption levels is far beyond what is likely sustainable."

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) panel said the world is already running out of cheap and quality sources of some essential materials such as oil, copper and gold, which in turn need rising volumes of fuel and water to produce.

It said that governments must find ways to do more with less, at a faster rate than economic growth -- the notion of "decoupling".

Currently people in rich nations consume an average of 16 tons of minerals, ores, [fossil fuels](#) and biomass -- fuels and other products from plants -- per year. In some wealthy countries the figure rises to 40 tons.

In India, however, the average person only consumes four tons per year, the report said.

The panel said there has to be a major rethink of resource use and "massive investment" in technological, financial and social innovation to at least freeze consumption levels in wealthy countries.

"People believe that environmental 'bads' are the price we must pay for economic 'goods'. However, we cannot and need not continue to act as if this trade-off is inevitable," said UNEP executive director Achim Steiner.

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