

TOEFL Integrated Writing Practice Test 15

Sea otters are a small mammal that lives in the waters along North America's west coast from California to Alaska. A few years ago some of the sea otter populations off of the Alaskan coast started to decline rapidly and raised several concerns because of their important role in the coastal ecosystem. Experts began investigating and came up with two possible explanations. One explanation was environmental pollution and the second was attacks by predators.

At first it seemed as if the pollution was the most likely cause for the population decline. One reason pollution was more likely was because of the known pollution sources along the Alaskan coast such as oil rigs. Also water samples taken in the area showed increased levels of chemicals that could decrease the otters' immune systems and indirectly result in their deaths.

Another thing that pointed to pollution as the culprit was the decline of other sea mammals such as seals in the same areas. This indicated that whatever was affecting the otters was also affecting the other sea mammals. Environmental pollution usually affects an entire ecosystem instead of just one species. Only predators that occurred in a large area, such as orcas (a large predatory whale), could cause the same effect, but they usually hunt larger prey.

Finally, scientists believed the pollution hypothesis would also explain the uneven pattern of otter decline. In some Alaskan locations the otter population declined greatly while other populations remained stable. Some experts suggested this could be explained by ocean currents, or other environmental factor, might have created uneven concentrations of pollutants along the coast.

Question: *Summarize the point made in the lecture and explain how the speaker cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.*

Although it's a new technology, solar energy provides benefits to the entire world. First, solar energy eliminates our reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels. Additionally, solar energy is non-pollutant, which makes it better for everyone. Finally, there is almost no maintenance as solar panels have a long life span without regular maintenance. So, the benefits seem to be overwhelmingly positive and supportive of further production.

The first benefit is the ability for solar energy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Many sources of energy are renewable only over millions of years. Unfortunately, humans consume those faster than they are produced. Solar energy could be a replacement for non-renewable sources as a perpetual source of energy. Thus solar energy can become a new energy with no legitimate fear of overproduction.

Another benefit is the non-pollutant aspect of solar energy. Burning fossil fuels is known to produce deadly pollution, while solar energy produces zero harmful byproducts. While current energy sources produce disgusting smells, sounds, and visuals, solar energy produces nothing offensive. Therefore, when considering the health of the planet, the lifelong health benefits of solar energy are unparalleled.

Finally, solar energy has low costs. The cost of solar panels is a one-time purchase. Also, after installation, the lifespan of a solar panel is thirty years. After the initial cost, the solar panel will cost almost nothing. This is a benefit to personal finances, but also peace of mind since there is no worry about rising prices or lack of resources.

In conclusion, these benefits provide support for more people to consider switching to solar power. Both the renewable aspect as well as the non-polluting aspect means that there will be added benefits for individuals, cities, and the planet. The low lifelong cost of installation and maintenance provides a lifetime of benefits. Thus, solar energy looks to be one of the world's great ideas.

Question: *Summarize the points in the lecture, being sure to explain how they address the specific ideas about solar energy described in the reading passage.*