

MILIEUS THAT ARE HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO POLLUTION

Human activity has left a legacy of pollution in the Arctic ranging from mining and oil company waste and town rubbish dumps to military bases and nuclear junkyards (submarines and their reactors). Unfortunately, a combination of low temperatures and long winter nights slows the process of milieu regeneration, and the permafrost makes it difficult to purify and recycle waste water and to dispose of household and industrial waste.



ALL POLLUTION ENDS UP IN THE OCEAN

The atmospheric currents in the Northern Hemisphere carry pollutants (soot, chlorine compounds, pesticides, heavy metals, radioactive waste, etc.) from the industrialised regions of Eurasia and America towards the North Pole. These contaminants fall to the surface with the rain and snow, above all in winter, and accumulate in the watercourses to be eventually washed down into the Arctic Ocean. There, they are absorbed by marine animals.



FOOD CHAINS AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES

The substances referred to as “organic or organochlorinated pollutants” (pesticides, PCB, etc.) and “heavy metals” (lead, mercury, cadmium) are toxic to all forms of life. They accumulate in organisms all along the food chain (from plankton and fish to marine mammals, for example). They are now found in the tissues of human beings as well as Arctic animals.



THE ARCTIC, AN INTERNATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

The release and discharge of contaminants in the Arctic is an international problem and requires international solutions. In 1991, an international initiative called the “Strategy for Protecting the Arctic Environment” was launched by the eight countries bordering the Arctic ecosystems. Then in 1996, they set up the Arctic Council whose main aim is to help evaluate and monitor pollution levels in the Deep North and to assess their consequences.