

Shifting Seasons: How Climate Change and Pollution Are Rewriting Nature's Calendar

For centuries, we've trusted the seasons to guide our lives - spring planting, summer growth, autumn harvest, winter rest. But today, climate change and pollution are altering these patterns. The seasons are no longer predictable, and new human-made "seasons" are appearing.

New Human-Made Seasons

Researchers describe seasons that exist only because of human activity:

- **Haze Season** in Southeast Asia, where burning forests to clear land fills the sky with smoke for weeks, creating dangerous air.
- **Trash Season** in Bali, when ocean tides bring tons of plastic onto the shores between November and March.

For people with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), these shifts mean longer periods of poor air quality and exposure to pollutants that can intensify symptoms.

Disappearing and Arrhythmic Seasons

Some seasons are disappearing entirely. Snow is less reliable in alpine regions, ending traditional winter sport seasons. Seabird breeding cycles in northern England are declining, threatening ecosystems.

Other changes create **arrhythmic seasons** - unnatural rhythms where springs come earlier, summers grow longer, and winters shrink. Rainfall is less predictable, and extreme weather events are more frequent. These shifts disorient plants, animals, and people, disrupting food systems, water supplies, and cultural traditions.

What This Means for People with MCS and Caregivers

The new rhythms of nature highlight just how vulnerable sensitive populations are:

- **Air quality becomes harder to trust.** Seasonal transitions no longer guarantee relief. Spring may come with pollen earlier, while wildfire smoke can fill the summer air for weeks.
- **Indoor environments grow more complicated.** As heating and cooling systems are used irregularly, they stir up mould, dust, and chemical residues.
- **Daily planning feels less predictable.** Weather apps may not reflect sudden shifts, leaving people unprepared for triggers like heat, dampness, or poor air circulation.

Adaptation vs. Root Causes

Communities have responded by installing air filters, improving forecasts, and issuing health alerts. While these efforts help, they risk normalizing these new seasons instead of addressing the root causes, such as deforestation, plastic waste, and industrial emissions.

For MCS communities, the lesson is clear: air purifiers and fragrance-free spaces are essential, but so is collective action to demand stronger protections, healthier policies, and safer environments.

Rethinking Time and Nature

Seasons aren't just blocks of time; they connect us to nature. As traditional rhythms disappear, we must listen to diverse knowledge systems, including Indigenous traditions, that track cycles of rain, sun, and soil.

For people with MCS and their caregivers, this shift is more than symbolic. Health and environment are deeply connected, and protecting vulnerable bodies requires protecting fragile ecosystems.

References

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