Over 90 percent of the world’s population breathes toxic air. But what are we talking about when we say toxic air?

One of the most critical air pollutants is particulate matter, or PM. PM is a complex mixture of solids, gases, and liquids. But where exactly does PM come from?

Some PM is directly admitted from human activities like industrial processes, power plants, and fossil fuel combustion. Others formed from natural sources including windblown dust and wildfires. PM2.5 can penetrate deep into the lungs, respiratory tract, and bloodstream.

On a global scale, the simple act of breathing is killing seven million people a year and harming billions more due to declining smoking rates. Air pollution now causes more deaths annually than...