BACKGROUND INFORMATION

• In 1969, the Indian subsidiary of American chemical company Union Carbide built a chemical factory in the city of Bhopal, the capital of the province of Madhya Pradesh in central India. In the early 1980s, there were numerous complaints by workers of pollution and accidental chemical leaks that caused injuries and deaths. ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Carbide_Bhopal_disaster))

• During the night of December 2-3, 1984, water got into a tank full of a chemical called methyl isocyanate at the factory, causing a chemical reaction that released 30 metric tonnes of methyl isocyanate gas. Winds blew the gas over several impoverished districts of Bhopal. ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Carbide_Bhopal_disaster))

• The Madhya Pradesh government estimates that 3,787 people were killed immediately by suffocation.

• There are claims that more than 16,000 people eventually died because of the gas leak. There were more than 500,000 injuries. The rate of stillborn children—babies who die before birth—increased 300%. ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Carbide_Bhopal_disaster))

• Even today, 30 years after the disaster, people in Bhopal still claim to experience health problems because of the leak, including breathing problems, eye problems, nerve system damage, and increased birth defects and infant deaths. ([Mother Jones](https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2014/12/bhopal-india))

• The government of India tried to sue the American parent company Union Carbide in an American Court. However, from 1986 to 1987, two different U.S. courts that heard the case both ruled that the factory was an independent company, owned and operated in India. Therefore India could not pursue a lawsuit in the United States. ([Stanford Journal](https://web.stanford.edu/group/energycircle/))

• In 1987, a district court in Bhopal ruled that the victims had a case against the U.S. parent company, and ordered Union Carbide to pay a beginning compensation of $270 million while the case continued to be tried in court. Union Carbide appealed the decision to the Indian Supreme Court. The Supreme Court forced Union Carbide and the Indian Government to agree on a final compensation. They agreed that Union would pay $470 million. ([Stanford Journal](https://web.stanford.edu/group/energycircle/))

• The chemical factory in Bhopal has been abandoned, and some tanks still contain toxic chemicals that are leaking into the groundwater. ([Amnesty International](https://www.amnesty.org/en/))

• In 2001, Dow Chemical bought Union Carbide. Dow has refused to take any responsibility for the disaster or for paying any more compensation or cleaning up the factory site. ([International Business Times](https://www.internationalbusinesstimes.co.uk/))
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS
- Themes: Economy, Environment, Employment, Global Issues
  Human Rights, Values and Ethics
- Course Connections: English, Canadian and World Studies, Social Sciences and the Humanities, Interdisciplinary Studies

MATERIALS
- Front board
- Student journals or note paper
- Writing utensils
- Chart paper

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS
Students will:
- Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
- Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
- Participate in active group work and class discussions.
- Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually.
- Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
- Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

MAP IT
Have students locate the different locations mentioned in the article to gain an understanding of the expanse and involvement of this issue.
- Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
- Canada
- Guatemala
- Ecuador

DISCUSS
1. How much did you know about the toxic gas leak in Bhopal, India prior to reading this article? If you did know anything, why is it important to know about cases like this?
2. Re-read the first paragraph of the Global Voices article that begins with “In the black of night.” What sort of imagery and emotions come to mind after reading this short excerpt of the article? What details help you visualize what happened on the night of December 3, 1984?
3. The article states that the toxic gas leak from that night is still causing serious health issues in the affected communities. List examples of how a toxic gas leak can affect the environment, people and community in the long term. Who do you think should be responsible for taking care of those affected?
4. Do you think working conditions today are better than they were in 1984? Why or why not? How do you know?
5. As consumers should we be more aware of these working conditions around the world? Are there places in the world where working conditions are worse than in other areas of the world? What can be done about it? Explain.
6. In your opinion, what responsibility do businesses have to act as good citizens in the communities where they operate? Why? Who benefits from a company with a good social standing?
7. Are you more or less likely to support a company has good social practices? Why?

DIVE DEEPER
To begin the activity, write “citizen” on the board and have students suggest words or sentences they believe define the word “citizen.” Share with students that a citizen is a member of a community with several rights and responsibilities that include: respecting the rights and freedoms of others, caring for and protecting their environment, and helping others in their community.

Next write the word “corporate citizenship” on the board. Based on the previous explanation of a “citizen,” ask students to write down their own definition for “corporate citizenship.” Share with students that corporate citizenship is a business's social responsibility to respect, care for and protect the community and environment in which it operates.

Ask students to address the following questions in pairs and write down their responses on chart paper.
- What are the most important responsibilities of a company?
- Who should the company leaders think about first: themselves, their shareholders, their stakeholders, their customers, their workers or the community and environment in which they work? List these in the order you think is correct from the top (highest concern) to bottom (lowest concern).

Divide the class into groups of three to four students and provide each group with chart paper. Tell students they will create a company with a product or service of their choice and they will develop a general set of guidelines that will present their commitment to corporate citizenship. Provide each group with the following instructions:

Side one of chart paper: Our Company
- Name of company
- Short description of your product or service (e.g. food, clothing, technology, jewellery, cleaning service, etc.)

Side two of chart paper: Our Corporate Citizenship Guidelines
- List four to six ways your company will exercise social responsibility

Below are a few questions that can assist in creating your set of guidelines:
- How will you provide a safe and healthy workplace for your employees?
- How will you support a diverse working environment?
- How will you positively contribute to the community in which your company operates?