

## Ghost towns

Throughout the world there are many **deserted** towns which are forbidden to visitors. These towns are not only unfit for humans, but also for surrounding plants and **wildlife** left behind.

These villages are toxic **wastelands** which have endured severe environmental damage over the years. These **ghost towns** look like something out of a horror movie, and are not fit even for exploring today. Let's take a look at the little towns you're not allowed to visit.

### **Number five:** Centralia, Pennsylvania

During 1962, the government decided to **incinerate** an enormous pile of rubbish at Centralia dump. This was a very bad idea, as the town's dump was located on top of an **abandoned** coal mine, along with most of the town. After the fire consumed the rubbish, it **ignited** the leftover coal of the coalmine, and spread throughout the remaining mine.

This created carbon monoxide, which **seeped** up through the ground. Disturbingly, people in the surrounding homes began to lose consciousness after sinkholes and cracks started appearing throughout the town.

Authorities realized they could not stop the fire and **relocated** the residents. Disturbingly, the fire *still* remains in the town, and it's been notified that part of the mine could collapse at any moment, making the ground dangerous to walk on. The town's air is also deadly; blowing out sulphur steam from out of the holes, which can **suffocate** a person today. This **abandoned** town remains **off-limits** to the public.

### **Number four:** Pripyat, Ukraine

This town was founded only two miles away from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The city was **renowned** for being designed by some of the best architects and wanted to be an example of how an **idealistic** vision of how communism could look.

However during 1986, parts of Chernobyl exploded after a failed safety test, resulting in radioactive waste being **unleashed** into the air. The cloud of radiation was so toxic that woodland surrounding the area simply died. Disturbingly, the Soviet government did not act straight away, and waited 36 hours before **evacuating** the town of Pripjat. At this stage many residents were showing **symptoms** of radiation poisoning, and 31 people died.

Within one month of the Chernobyl accident, the World Health Organization and Greenpeace **predicted** that the long term death toll could eventually be as high as 90,000.

Today the town is less radioactive than going through an airport security scanner three times, however studies of the local wildlife show that radiation poisoning is still happening; birds have significantly smaller brains, trees grow smaller, and there are fewer insects.

### **Number three:** Whitman, Western Australia

Whitman was the largest town located on Australia's only blue **asbestos** mine. During the 1940s, mining began to boom in the area and continued for more than 30 years. However a connection was made between **asbestos** dust and lung disease, and the Australian government closed down the mine. Sadly, this was too late as the **asbestos** had already done **irreversible** damage to the town and its residents.

It was discovered that people who lived in the area were 20 to 83 percent more likely to die from cancer than the rest of the population, and out of 20,000 people who lived in Whitman, 2000 died from **asbestos**-related diseases.

Amazingly, the government considered cleaning up Whitman, but soon decided it would be safer to relocate the people and abandon the town altogether. Throughout the decades, the local government used Asbestos as construction material on roads, pipelines, airstrips and even golf courses, which has now been banned.

People even brought Asbestos into their homes to use as sand pits to reduce dust around the house. **Fibres** found in **asbestos** can easily be **inhaled**, and can **pierce** a lung, causing **inflammation** and releasing **mutations** that promote tumour growth.

Just a brief **exposure** to **asbestos** can cause mesothelioma and lung cancer.

### **Number two:** Picher, Oklahoma

After the discovery of lead and zinc **deposits** in 1914, the town of Picher was born. As both metals were needed during World War one, the town soon grew in population.

The town's community was made up of mostly miners, and eventually Picher became the largest **exporter** of zinc and lead in the world. However, during the 1970s, dark times hit the town, and the mining that the town had survived on left behind a toxic by-product called "Chad", a chalky substance. This stuff was poisonous, and there was an estimated one 178 million tons of it.

Chad was infused in the mill sand and was piled around the town. The local townspeople initially had no idea that Chad was poisonous and would use the substance to fill up the driveways, and even children's sandboxes.

Shockingly, families would even have picnics on the Chad piles. The high school track team would train on them, and children rode their bikes on the chalky substance.

It was not until the 1990s when they discovered it was a health risk, containing lead, and a staggering 46 percent of the children tested positive to high levels of lead. Eventually the town was evacuated with residents being relocated.

Even though the air meets the government's minimum **standards**, the town is still toxic, and windy days can still blow large amounts of lead throughout the city.

Disturbingly, in 2015 over 1,000 **migratory** birds were discovered dead from zinc poisoning across the town of Picher.

### **Number one:** Treece, Kansas

During the early 20th century, lead, zinc and iron **ore** deposits were discovered, leading to the creation of Treece. The town of Treece supplied most of the **ore** during World Wars. Years later during the 1970's, much of the town's environment had been destroyed, and Treece's air had turned deadly.

Disturbingly, children who once lived in the town and had played in the **contaminated** swimming holes would go home with reddish skin. Their parents would assume it was sunburn. However, they later found that they had received chemical burns.

Treece residents began to suspect the lead was poisoning them. Blood tests eventually proved them right, and the town was declared unfit for humans. Today the town is surrounded by millions of tons of lead and zinc mining waste.

Similar to the town of Picher, mountains of chat flank the town, as winds blow the dust throughout the city. Years of mining has left the earth **unstable**, leading to hundreds of cave-ins, and trees is still being decontaminated.

**Vocabulary words:**

**Deserted**      **wildlife**      **wastelands**      **incinerate**  
**Abandoned**      **ignite**      **seep**      **relocate**  
**Suffocate**      **off-limits**      **renowned**      **idealistic**  
**Unleashed**      **evacuating**      **symptoms**      **predicted**  
**Asbestos**      **irreversible**      **Fibres**      **inhaled**  
**Pierce**      **inflammation**      **mutations**      **exposure**  
**Deposits**      **export**      **standards**      **migratory**  
**Ore**      **contaminated**      **unstable**      **decontaminated**

Word	Definition	Synonyms
Deserted		
	<i>Left behind</i>	Deserted
	<i>Wild animals</i>	Fauna
Ignite		
	<i>As things should be</i>	Perfectionistic
Export		Spread out
	<i>May fall or break at any time</i>	

**Writing tasks:**

Answer the following questions *in your own words*.

**What happened in 1962 in Centralia?**

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**Why was the government's decision to burn the rubbish such a bad idea?**

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**What happened in 1986 at the Chernobyl power plant? Why?**

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**What effects of the Chernobyl disaster can be seen in Prypiat today?  
Why is this bad?**

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**Why is asbestos so dangerous?**

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**Which of the five abandoned towns would you *least* like to visit? Why?**

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