Pollution affects more than a billion people worldwide. Each year, the environmental group Blacksmith Institute highlights the most polluted places. In 2009, the group changed its focus to nations that have succeeded in cleaning up their act. “We figured telling positive stories would help people feel enthusiastic about doing something,” Blacksmith president Richard Fuller told TFK. Here are four of the 12 success stories.

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**Problem:** Car batteries were not recycled properly, and lead seeped into the soil and water supplies. Lead poisoning is a danger.

**Solution:** Governments and environmental groups joined forces to sponsor a cleanup campaign.

**Outcome:** Area residents saw a significant reduction in lead levels.

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**Problem:** People exposed to fumes from leaded gasoline are at great risk of health problems, including impaired brain development.

**Solution:** Governments banned the use of leaded gasoline.

**Outcome:** As of 2009, only 11 countries continued to use leaded gasoline. Lead levels in children have dropped.

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**Problem:** Exposure to the radioactive particles from a nuclear power plant accident has caused cancer in area residents.

**Solution:** Improve living conditions, set up medical clinics and therapy camps (right, in Belarus).

**Outcome:** More than 14,600 kids have participated in therapy camps to improve their health.

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**Problem:** A stockpile of the dangerous pesticide DDT was getting into the soil and streams.

**Solution:** Tanzania worked with international groups and German companies to destroy the DDT.

**Outcome:** More than 100 tons of DDT and contaminated material were removed.

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For more on Earth Day, go to timeforkids.com/earthday10.