

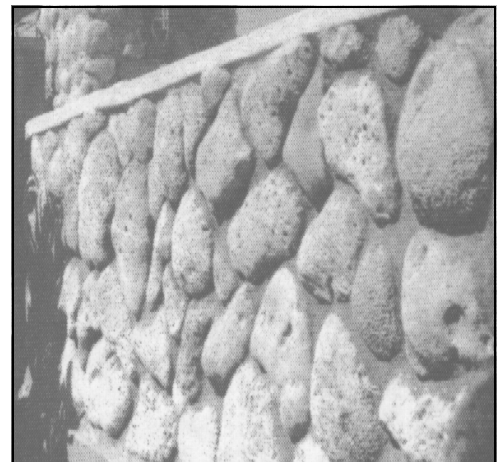
Source: **The Incredible Coral Reef** by Toni Albert. Trickle Creek Books, 500 Andersonstown Road, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania 17055 Tel: 1-800-353-2791. Used with permission.

44*. THREATS TO THE CORAL REEF

Coral reefs have existed for millions of years. They have survived countless large and small changes in the environment. But today, coral reefs around the world are threatened as never before. Reefs in at least twenty countries, including the United States, Mexico, Indonesia, Japan, and Australia, are showing signs of stress and distress. Coral reefs in Florida are disappearing at an alarming rate. Coral diseases and **coral bleaching** occur when the water off Florida is no longer clear and clean, or when the water temperatures rise. In Hawaii, beautiful coral reefs have been damaged or killed by sewage pollution, dumped waste, or dredged mud. Many scientists agree that if the trend continues for another twenty or thirty years, there may not be any healthy coral reefs left on earth.

Directions: Read below about threats to coral reefs. Put an **N** next to the natural threats (caused by nature) and an **H** next to the human threats (caused by people). Which do you think are more dangerous to coral reefs—natural events or the activities of people?

- _____ 1. Hurricanes and tropical storms break and topple coral and batter fish.
- _____ 2. Construction on or near the reef destroys coral or muddies the water, so that corals smother.
- _____ 3. Overfishing and destructive fishing methods (such as using dynamite, cyanide, bleach, fish traps, gill nets, or huge forty-mile-long drift nets) spoil the reef ecosystem.
- _____ 4. Too much rain dilutes the water, so that it isn't salty enough for corals.
- _____ 5. Marine debris is dangerous to corals, birds, sea turtles, fish, and other marine animals.
- _____ 6. Divers, snorkelers, and fishermen damage the reef with boats, anchors, and heavy gear. Even touching coral or standing on it can kill it.
- _____ 7. Changes in currents can smother corals in mud.
- _____ 8. Collecting tropical fish, corals, and shells strips the reef of life.
- _____ 9. Pollution from oil spills, chemical wastes, run-off from farms and factories, and sewage ruins the water quality that corals need.
- _____ 10. Natural predators, such as parrotfish, sponges, and sea urchins, eat corals or weaken it by boring into it.
- _____ 11. Warmer water caused by the greenhouse effect may cause coral bleaching, a dangerous condition that occurs when corals lose their algae partners.



Coral is often used in construction.

Correlation to National Standards from McREL (<http://www.mcrel.org>) :

Life Sciences

6. Understands relationships among organisms and their physical environment

Geography

8. Understands the characteristics of ecosystems on Earth's surface
14. Understands how human actions modify the physical environment