

Human Interactions with Karst Environments

Slide 1

If you ever visit a cave, one of the first things you will be told is to not touch any of the speleothems. Natural oils on our skin can damage the fragile formations. Many caves discovered in the 1800s and early 1900s have had their speleothems severely damaged by curious tourists who did not understand that handling the cave formations damages them. People have also broken stalactites and stalagmites off, to take home pieces as souvenirs. Also, tourist caves have to have lighting systems installed in them, but caves are naturally extremely dark. As soon as light is introduced to a cave, soon green plants begin to grow within them. This disrupts the caves' natural ecosystems and accelerates biological weathering within the caves.

Slide 2

Imagine you have recently bought your first home. It's the perfect location—close to the beaches and convenient to schools and shopping centers. But then you find out something else about the location. It's also an area prone to sinkholes because it's in a karst environment. Sinkholes can swallow up homes, businesses, and roads when they open. Homeowners in karst areas often have to pay huge insurance payments to cover the risk of sinkholes. And in large-population areas, the problem is only made worse when over pumping of groundwater leaves the land vulnerable to collapse.