



THE TRUTH ABOUT CO₂

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What are two of the dirtiest words in the English language? Well, if you're concerned with Global Warming as so many people are these days, the answer is obvious. The two words are "Carbon Dioxide." Or as it is known by its chemical symbol – CO₂. One atom of carbon and two atoms of oxygen. If we pump much more of it into the atmosphere, the argument goes, we're going to alter the climate. Catastrophically.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the IPCC, CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels, which constitute 85% of our energy use must be reduced to zero by 2100. If we don't save ourselves from ourselves, we're toast. That's the claim.

Here's what strange, though. All life is carbon-based, and the carbon for all that life originates from carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. All of the carbon in the fossil fuels we are burning for energy today was once in the atmosphere as carbon dioxide before it was consumed by plankton in the sea and plants on the land. Coal, oil, and natural gas are the remains of those plankton and plants that have been transformed by heat and pressure deep in the earth's crust.

In other words, fossil fuels are 100 percent organic and were produced with solar energy. Sounds positively green.

If there were no carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere, the Earth would be a dead planet. Period. Talk about catastrophic climate change. Take away CO₂ and you'd have it. And yet, the US Environmental Protection Agency has deemed this essential ingredient for life a pollutant! But, how can something that makes life possible be bad?

Before I deal with that question, let's get clear on our terms. It has become common to refer to the emissions from burning fossil fuels for energy as "carbon" emissions. That is entirely misleading. Carbon dioxide is not carbon. Carbon dioxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas which is an indispensable food source for all living things. Can you have too much of it? In theory, yes. That's what climate alarmists say is happening now – CO₂ levels are getting too high. Are they right? Well, if we look at the big picture we find something surprising.

For most of the history of life on earth carbon dioxide has been present in the atmosphere at much higher levels than it is today. During the Cambrian explosion, when multi-cellular life first came on the scene, CO₂ levels were as much as 10 times higher than they are today. From a big picture perspective, we're actually living in a low carbon dioxide era. The optimum level of CO₂ for plant growth, for example, is four to five times what is currently found in our atmosphere. That's why greenhouse growers worldwide actually inject additional CO₂ into their greenhouses – they want to promote plant growth. Likewise, higher CO₂ levels in the

global atmosphere will boost food and forest productivity. That will come in handy since by mid-century we will have to feed 8-10 billion people.

In fact, we're already seeing the positive effects of increased carbon dioxide now. Satellite measurements have noted the "greening of the earth" as crops and forests grow due to our higher levels of CO₂. It turns out that carbon dioxide are not "dirty" words after all. We should celebrate CO₂ as the giver of life that it is.

I'm Patrick Moore, co-founder of Greenpeace for Prager University.