

The 'pollutant' vital to earthly life

Richard Stegemeier, Orange County Register, 12-29-2009

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The air we breathe contains 20 percent oxygen, which is vital to the survival of all human and animal life. Without oxygen we would all die within minutes. Atmospheric carbon dioxide on the other hand, at less than 0.04 percent, is a seemingly insignificant gas unworthy of legislative concern. Yet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson, without congressional direction or approval, declared this month that CO₂ is a dangerous pollutant that endangers the health of every human on Earth and must be controlled by her bureaucracy.

Obviously, Administrator Jackson's declaration was meant to frighten the American public, not to enlighten them, and cannot be taken seriously. Researchers in the United Kingdom report that CO₂ levels in classrooms often exceed concentrations 10 times higher than ambient air without producing any ill effects.

So what is this presumably poisonous gas that has suddenly become the No. 1 health hazard on the EPA's hit list? Every human exhales a little more than two pounds of CO₂ every day, just to stay alive. The world's population of over 6.3 billion people exhales more than 2.5 billion tons of CO₂ every year, only slightly less than America's total emissions from petroleum.

John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, once said, "Man always and everywhere is a blight on the planet." Is this now the official line of the EPA?

Agronomists tell us that CO₂, far from being a poison, is vital to all plant growth. If today's atmospheric CO₂ concentration were to be cut in half, all vegetation would wither and die. Subsequently, without plant food all animal life would also perish within a short time. Agronomists also tell us that if CO₂ levels were to double, plant growth could increase by as much as 40 percent without any effect on human health. In fact, rising CO₂ levels caused by burning fossil fuels may be essential for food production necessary to sustain a world population expected to increase to 9 billion by 2050.

During the 250 years since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the world has emitted more than 1 trillion metric tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere yet the atmospheric concentration of the gas has increased only from 0.03 percent to 0.04 percent. During the remainder of this century, if we burned every remaining pound of coal reserves, every recoverable barrel of crude oil and every producible cubic foot of natural gas, atmospheric CO₂ would double, to about 0.07 percent of the atmosphere, well below any detrimental effect on health.

Global warming and cooling is a real phenomenon that has been observed for the past two millennia of mostly anecdotal recorded history. However, the attribution of warming to the burning of fossil fuels has not been proven. In fact, despite a continuous rise in CO₂ levels, climate models can explain neither the global temperature decrease from 1945-70 nor the recent decline since the late 1990s. This disconcerting truth is being called "a tragedy" by some climatologists who knowingly recognize that their models are unable to replicate the past and therefore cannot be used to predict the future.

Ms. Jackson's declaration obviously was not really about protecting human health but rather a disingenuous attempt to influence the recent climate change meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, and to prepare the nation for carbon dioxide cap-and-trade legislation next year.

No one believes China, India and the developing world will abide by the EPA's declarations. Why should we?