

Activist Teacher

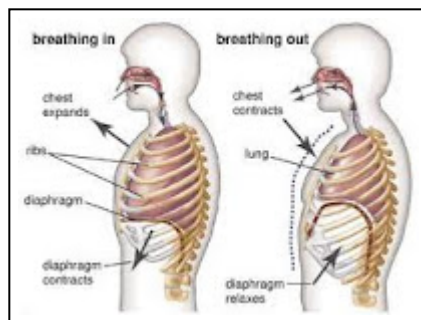
Articles and commentary about activist teaching and radical pedagogy, and social theory and critique essays, by Dr. Denis G. Rancourt

SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2010

➤ CO2 emission from fossil fuel burning is not more than from breathing

by Denis G. Rancourt

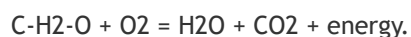
This essay was first posted on the Activist Teacher blog.



The present (2010) rate of CO2 emission from fossil fuel burning, expressed as kilograms of carbon per year, is 0.8×10^{13} kg-C/y (where, in scientific notation, $10^{13} = 10,000,000,000,000$ with thirteen zeros). This includes all fossil fuel CO2 emissions; from petroleum, coal, natural gas, and cement production.

My calculation (below) shows that this rate of CO2 emission is roughly equal to the CO2 emissions from the simple breathing of air of humans and domestic animals (humans, cattle, swine, sheep, goats, chickens, pets, etc.), so-called anthropogenic (from humankind) animal breathing.

Energy for life comes from the burning of food fuel. Organic matter is burned using the oxygen that we breathe and this controlled combustion produces CO2 gas and H2O water. Organic matter can be represented by the generic formula C-H2-O and the breathing (or burning) reaction is simply the reverse of the photosynthesis reaction as:



In this reaction, each C in organic matter produces one CO2 molecule on burning.

The metabolic rate of an animal (or living being) is the rate of energy expenditure needed to sustain life functions (such as the pumping of

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Denis G. Rancourt is a former tenured full professor of physics at the University of Ottawa, Canada. He is a researcher for the [Ontario Civil Liberties Association](#) and a social theorist. He has published [more than 100 articles in leading scientific journals](#), on physics and environmental science. He is the author of the book [Hierarchy and](#)

blood, etc.) and to power any work done by the animal (such as walking, running, lifting, etc.)

The metabolic rate for humans primarily depends on age, sex, and body weight. Representative values (somewhat similar for all large warm blooded animals) are: 1 Watt per kilogram of body weight (W/kg) for sleep, 4 W/kg for walking, and 18 W/kg for running. Below we use a representative average value for all humans and domestic animals to be 5 W/kg.

Our task therefore is to evaluate the metabolic rate of energy use requirements of all humans (6.7 billion individuals) and their domestic animals (1.3 billion cows, etc.), in order to use the above chemical reaction to obtain the needed global rate of O2 consumption which, in turn is equal (on a per molecule basis) to the rate of global CO2 production from anthropogenic animal breathing.

In evaluating the energy required for burning organic matter (food), a most convenient approximation is to note that the energy produced is proportional to the amount of oxygen consumed. The proportionality is fairly constant for all food types and is approximately twenty kilojoules of energy per litre of oxygen gas at standard atmospheric conditions: 20 kJ/L. (One litre of gas at normal pressure and temperature conditions contains 0.04 moles of the gas molecules. One mole is 6.02×10^{23} molecules.)

Now rather than use living body weight in the metabolic rate formula, we use the same convention as for biomass and express all human and domestic animal body weights in kilograms of carbon, kg-C. Dry weight (water removed) is approximately 30% of living body weight and approximately half of the weight of dry natural organic matter is carbon.

This leads to the convenient final formula:

$$R\text{-CO}_2 = R_{\text{met}} \times M_{\text{bio}} \times [5.5 \text{ kg/Wy}]$$

where R-CO2 is the calculated rate of CO2 emission (expressed in kilograms of carbon per year, kg-C/y) corresponding to an amount Mbio (expressed in kg-C) of breathing biomass (whatever humans or domestic animals one wishes to count) and where the factor of 5.5 kg/Wy is in units of kilograms per Watt-year.


Using $R_{\text{met}} = 5 \text{ W/kg}$ and Mbio for all humans and domestic animals on the planet equal to $4 \times 10^{11} \text{ kg-C}$, we obtain $R\text{-CO}_2 = 1 \times 10^{13} \text{ kg-C/y}$ which is comparable in value to the present rate of CO2 emission from fossil fuel burning of $0.8 \times 10^{13} \text{ kg-C/y}$.

The global CO2 emission rate from fossil fuel burning is comparable to the rate of CO2 emission from global anthropogenic animal breathing. Our fossil fuel burning contributes the same amount to atmospheric CO2 as our breathing and the breathing of our domestic animals.

Furthermore, if we consider that all living things breathe (admittedly

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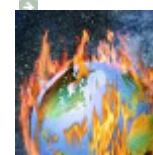
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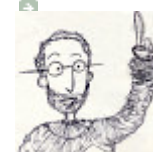
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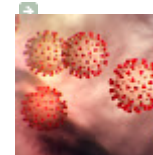
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some microbes don't breathe oxygen) and that Earth's (living) biomass is approximately 10^{15} kg-C, then total global breathing may well exceed the CO2 emissions from fossil fuel burning by a factor of between ten and one thousand times greater.

I hope that the present comparison to the natural act of breathing will serve to encourage a re-examination of the misguided notion that the trace gas and essential nutrient known as CO2 could be of any danger to humans or to Earth's ecological systems.

The day CO2 became a pollutant was a sad day for both establishment science and First-World middleclass canned policy consumers.

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Denis G. Rancourt was a tenured and full professor of physics and environmental science researcher at the University of Ottawa in Canada. He practiced several areas of science which were funded by a national agency and ran an internationally recognized laboratory. He published over 100 articles in leading scientific journals. He developed popular activism courses and was an outspoken critic of the university administration and a defender of student and Palestinian rights. He was fired for his dissidence in 2009 by a president who is a staunch supporter of Israeli policy. [See rancourt.academicfreedom.ca]

Posted by [Denis Rancourt](#) at 1:47 PM



This is the best

Labels: [breathing](#), [carbon](#), [climate](#), [global warming](#)

16 comments:



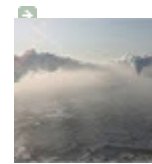
[peter laux](#) said...

Priceless, Denis.

I wonder in the future how these panicking warmest "chicken-littles" will be viewed. Mockery as deserved I would suspect. After all the opposite of being sceptical is being Gullible.

The vital nutrient, CO2's only crime is to be the common link between all our concentrated energy sources, (bar uranium) so as to be used to tie up energy exploitation, supply and controlled demand by monopoly capitalists, financiers and Government. (A hallmark of fascism)

Mother earth's good, natural, organic coal, oil and gas has brought us out of a world of darkness, disease, back breaking labor and human misery, to one of light, hope, advancement and prosperity



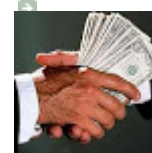
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- [Activist Climate Guy](#)
- [Against the dismissal of Denis Rancourt \(FB group\)](#)
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that
if continued can provide all of humankind with this miraculous, in historical terms, way of life.

My god I am just a worker and yet water flows freely into my home with the twist of a tap and pipes take away disease causing sewerage. When cold I turn a knob for instant, cheap heat and I don't even have to cut down trees to provide energy for cooking! I can travel further in 5 minutes than a man in the past could in a day, and its all due to coal and oil!
I live in a house where every member of the family has their own room !

Now angst ridden, fat, safe and secure First world middle-classes rail against that! That is truly 'biting the hand that feeds you.' These poverty loving (for others only) dupes could not name any other time in history of such material Good, nor could they or would they do without these luxuries !

I think they are really afraid of the spectre of masses of ordinary people using 'their' elite privileged entitlements and worst still, the yellow, black and brown hordes, using 'stuff' !

They are afraid there is not enough.

To bastardise Menchen; -


"Environmentalism ; the haunting fear that someone, somewhere is consuming something !"

August 22, 2010 at 5:10 PM 

 Morocco Bama said...

The day CO2 became a pollutant was a sad day for both establishment science and First-World middleclass canned policy consumers.

The day a certain range of atmospheric oxygen levels necessary to sustain life became irrelevant was a sad day for.....all living things.


August 22, 2010 at 7:46 PM 

 Anonymous said...

Global warming is caused by green house gases.

95% of the total green house gas concentration is in the form of water vapour.

Therefore, we need to limit CO2.

August 22, 2010 at 7:52 PM 

 Morocco Bama said...

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Denis, do you really approve of the peter's post? Really? Honestly?

For instance, he says:

Mother earths good, natural, organic coal, oil and gas has brought us out of a world of darkness, disease, back breaking labor and human misery, to one of light, hope, advancement and prosperity that if continued can provide all of humankind with this miraculous, in historical terms, way of life.

Denis, you must renounce this, or stand in league with it. Forgetting Anthropogenic Global Warming/Climate Change for the moment, this poster implies that you and he are in concert when it comes to the beneficence of the burning of "Mother Earth's coal, oil and gas." No, there's no downside to that extraction and burning, it's all peaches and cream. What about nuclear. Peter forgot to add nuclear. Doesn't Great Grandmother Universe provide nuclear and all its wonderment?

August 22, 2010 at 7:55 PM 



 [peter laux](#) said...

Really Morocco, thats a bit strong isn't it, I didn't kill anyone did I ?

" Denis, you must renounce this, or stand in league with it. "

Mate thats sounds like script from bad Stalinist theatre.

What will happen if Denis doesn't ? Gulag?

Actually, with the religious overtones of the AGW faith, a Star Chamber is more likely !

I'm havin a bit of fun with you Morocco but I am frustrated by the 'Luddite' attitude of many, so called progressives, when they can't see the difference between energy and energy corporation. To 'go-back' in regards to energy is regressive until you have a better, more efficient or cheaper source of energy for those who find obtaining the necessities of life a struggle.

I want to talk of the 'peaches and cream' as the negatives of extraction and use of fossil fuels are insignificant compared to life without them.

All we ever hear is the unthinking mantra of, 'blah, oil bad', 'whine, coal dirty', ad infinitum, without ever hearing the obvious benefits that the 'complainants' are enjoying as they bemoan being 'addicted to oil'. (groan, thats just obtuse)

Do you use this demonic energy or is your computer powered by a peddle dynamo ?

You sit in your heated and secure environment because of hydrocarbon energy's evil sway.

Pollution is not desirable but even the worst is short term and

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nature destroys and pollutes far worse than we. The more we develop, the less pollution we cause, a good coal powered station emits bugger all pollution. (and CO2 is not pollution and 'CO2 as pollution' is an oxymoron)

When Krakatoa vaporised and blew 22 sq kilometers of horrid pollutants into the sky in one medium sized volcanic eruption - that was more pollution in one hit than mankind has made since he first harnessed fire. When Toba blew it was 2800 sq kilometres.
(hows that for extraction!)

We are neither the power or the threat to life on this planet as only 10,000 to 14,000 years ago much of Canada, Nth USA and Europe was a kilometre under ice, thats real climate change, thats real environmental destruction.

At that time the Amazon was grassland and savannah not a James Cameron 3D wonderland !

That is only a minute ago in 'earth history time' and if the cycle of the last 1ma holds true, anytime now till 10,000years into the future, that cold natural environmental devastation is due to return.

Cold is bad for life, warming is good.

4.5 billion years of earth history tells us that.

And in case that doesn't smash civilisation, there are 3 super volcanos that can blow at any time, thats real power.

So mate lets fight to give the 3rd world cheap concentrated coal and oil energy so they can have potable water and sewerage and ALL the benefits of the 1st world.

You would agree that its a tragedy watching your kids die from preventable water borne disease or want of food and I think fixing that is more important than the temporary stain and local despoilment from the odd oil spill.

Though unfortunately from the attitudes I now encounter, you wouldn't think so.

So lets not waste oil and coal by leaving it in the ground but use it for the good it brings.

The problem is neither oil or coal but those who control it and use it for control.

As for CO2 it is a trace gas and the most essential nutrient to plant and animal life on the planet, oceans hold most solar energy not atmosphere, so it cant drive warming.

If it does, id love to see just one scientific evidence, just one, I have been waiting for 20years!

August 23, 2010 at 8:32 AM 



 [peter laux](#) said...

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August 23, 2010 at 8:40 AM 

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[peter laux](#) said...

This comment has been removed by a blog administrator.

August 23, 2010 at 8:44 AM

[Morocco Bama](#) said...

The problem is neither oil or coal but those who control it and use it for control.

Once again, it's not an either/or proposition. Both have brought destruction, and both can concomitantly be a problem....and both are a problem.

It's irrelevant whether I use oil and coal, the fact that I had no say in the matter and was born into a system that indoctrinates you into its many uses, accustoms you to it, then hangs it in your face saying "look, you use it to" is what is relevant. There was no democratic process concerning resource extraction and control, and there is no democratic process still. In all fairness, there can't be a democratic process when, as you say, the vast majority of the first world are extracted energy junkies and the third world is so desperate from colonial fall-out that they would welcome any short-term relief at the expense of their long-term health and well-being. How else are any of these people going to vote? Certainly not in their best interests. Of course they're going to say more extraction, more pollution. It's a no-brainer, but it doesn't make it right.

I charge Denis with renouncing your original post because you sound like an obvious pitchman for the extractive industries themselves. Denis is doing them a great service when he takes on the spin machine that surrounds global warming/climate change yet let's industry spokesmen like yourself in the back door to talk nonsense about the beauty of coal and oil, and the wonderful life it has provided all of us, and can provide those poor afflicted souls in the third world.

You sound like the pitchman in Thank You For Not Smoking, but instead your pitch is Thank You For Burning Fossil Fuel.....and continue to do so, and encourage all others to do so, as well.

You can't write better satire than what you have posted. Maybe that's just it. Your comments are meant to be satire, but if that's the case, you have some dry wit there....that wit's as dry as a desert.

August 23, 2010 at 10:24 AM



[peter laux](#) said...

Denis, apologies for the 'multiple postings' - I kept being 'told' that it was to large to post' so would re-edit, can you remove the multiples?

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Morocco,

You state, "It's irrelevant whether I use oil and coal, the fact that I had no say in the matter and was born into a system that indoctrinates you into its many uses, accustoms you to it, then hangs it in your face saying "look, you use it to" is what is relevant."

I cant argue with that, I will not continue to argue with people who think they should have been consulted on which system they were born into.

But you have a say now mate, turn off your 'extracted' computer, turn off from the grid and go into the wild naked.

And by the way i'm a Train driver, not a pitchman for the extraction industry in the same way you are probably not a CIA plant to discredit the left, though I am not sure. But as a sane and non hypocritical westerner, I do appreciate and support mineral extraction and encourage others to be appreciative of how fortunate we are and how we should share that with the world, especially the poor.

Hmmm, maybe I am a pitchman, as we say at work when the throttle opens on a locomotive and vast amounts of diesel fuel are hungrily and rapidly devoured, "Feed her the fossils!"

August 23, 2010 at 4:18 PM 

 Morocco Bama said...

Mother earths good, natural, organic coal, oil and gas has brought us out of a world of darkness

Really? And what's so terrible about darkness, afterall? Is the erudite train driver afraid of the dark?

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/11/light-pollution/klinkenborg-text/2>

In most cities the sky looks as though it has been emptied of stars, leaving behind a vacant haze that mirrors our fear of the dark and resembles the urban glow of dystopian science fiction. We've grown so used to this pervasive orange haze that the original glory of an unlit night—dark enough for the planet Venus to throw shadows on Earth—is wholly beyond our experience, beyond memory almost. And yet above the city's pale ceiling lies the rest of the universe, utterly undiminished by the light we waste—a bright shoal of stars and planets and galaxies, shining in seemingly infinite darkness.

I guess we can just read about the stars in books written by famous people or see images of them on t.v, in movies or on the internet....all powered by natural, healthy, organic coal and oil. Jesus Christ, it sounds like an orange juice commercial with Anita Bryant.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TaQabiB7Gg>

August 23, 2010 at 6:17 PM 



 **peter laux** said...

Morocco, wow, such devastating arguments i'm sure, if only I could follow them. Blind to the poor stars now, 'oh the humanity', 'oh the existential pain', very poetic i'm sure.

Maybe the verse could include,

"if I could only get off my fat arse and drive to the country where there is less light I would see stars till I got sick of looking at them after three minutes and drive back to the city and its comforts, to long for nature in the abstract yet again."

Mate, that drivel you posted is a teenage girl wistfulness and fantasy, its pathetic, dream on and your quote, "Really? And what's so terrible about darkness, afterall? Is the erudite train driver afraid of the dark?"

I think that shows your anti-working class slip, how dare I !

Its strange that mankind has always sought light and advancement, yet you don't, that is counter to all human history.

Darkness indeed, I have suggested for years that a dark and anti-life psyche is needed to distort CO2 from the most important nutrient for life into a pollution.

Its the expression of the sub-conscious realism of misanthropes. CO2 as Pollution is an oxymoron.

As I said before, if your too oversensitive to endure this horrible prosperity that all of mankind would see as good, because it is, go live in the wild.

Reject your heritage and spend your nights counting stars.

I prefer a little impermanent haze and light glare to cold, cholera, tooth rot, having to cart wood and water, infant mortality, lice, back breaking labor and a short brutal life.









































So not only is coal and oil, natural and organic, which strangely you seem to struggle with as if it doesn't fit the 'image and likeness' of your vision of nature, it is good or don't you like your computer, heating and lights?


So good in fact, that I as a worker I can live as only kings did and what perversion would it be to not want my children or others to enjoy it?

Why cant you enjoy and appreciate these blessings?

You curse your good fortune.

Morocco, its not leftist to be a luddite or anti prosperity or anti fossil fuel, its just neurotic.

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August 25, 2010 at 7:18 AM 

 Anonymous said...

Ok I tried to follow your reasoning and got roughly the same answer (though you don't really justify the 5W representative value, and I think your chosen values overstate the CO2 produced per human). You could make the steps a little clearer too (the 5.5 'factor' came out of nowhere).

What I understand your reasoning to be is:

1. The level of CO2 produced by biomass is on the same order as that burned by fossil fuels.
2. Therefore CO2 is harmless
3. Therefore AGW is falsified.

To be fair 3 isn't explicitly stated, but I get the impression that it's implied. The problem is I don't think it follows. Consider this analogy:

I have a sink filled with water. A faucet is filling the sink at 1 litre/minute while a drain drains water at 1 litre/minute. The water level will stay constant. Now I add a second faucet which also adds 1 litre/minute of water. Your argument applied to this situation is:

1. The water coming from the second faucet is the same rate as the first.
2. Therefore water is harmless
3. Therefore the sink will not overflow.

Clearly this line of reasoning is fallacious because the sink WILL overflow.

If you imagine the sink is the atmosphere and each faucet represents the sources of CO2 (biomass, fossil fuels), and the drain is the atmosphere's ability to scrub CO2, you can see my point. Just because the magnitude of the sources of biomass and fossil fuels are the same, says nothing about the system as a whole. I'm afraid I can't see the logical steps from 'magnitude are the same' to AGW is false. If this is in other posts then I stand corrected, but taking this post as a singular unit does not yield that logical chain. Care to comment?

August 31, 2010 at 4:17 PM 



 Denis Rancourt said...

I will answer such technical questions if you verifiably identify yourself.

You can also ask by email and I will post the result here.

August 31, 2010 at 7:50 PM 

 LaymanAlert said...

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Hello, I've been studying this issue for about 3 years. I just wanted to contribute here by responding to the short statement by Anonymous:

"Global warming is caused by green house gases."

Since this is an academic blog, I'll just correct you here in that established Climate Science states that the Green House Effect is caused by Green House Gases. 'Global Warming' is supposed to be an increase of this effect. The GHE is a magic 33 degrees Celsius, and by all known laws of physics it cannot exist, you can't get energy out of nothing. But we're talking 'Climate Science', so yes, assuming the GHE exists, you can crank it up or down just by playing with GHG concentrations. Taxes will work wonderfully for this. This is not a scam, it has nothing to do with the UN's Agenda 21.

And continuing:

"95% of the total green house gas concentration is in the form of water vapour. Therefore, we need to limit CO2."

Therefore...what? CO2 is a terrible absorber of heat (it sucks). Water vapour is much better, it's used to cool car engines and nuclear power plants. So if you believe in the GHE, water vapour is your 'man'. concentrate on him.

September 2, 2010 at 12:06 AM 



 [the last name left](#) said...

the misguided notion that the trace gas and essential nutrient known as CO2 could be of any danger to humans or to Earth's ecological systems.

You want to live on Venus? You think it'd be tickety-boo?

I don't understand how you can say this.









































September 13, 2010 at 7:24 PM 



 [De todo y de nada](#) said...

Livestock consumes carbon from plants. Humans consume carbon from livestock (and also directly from plants). The only source in the planet for alimentary carbon are plants. And carbon for plants just comes from CO2 in the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Animals just recycle carbon in the system through digestive and breathing processes. Increasing populations of humans and livestock (1,2 billion humans and 750 million cows in 1850 vs. 6,8 billion humans and some 1,5 billion cows in 2010, as an example) has had a net contribution to taking CO2 out of the atmosphere by incorporating it to the total animal mass.

Increasing CO2 in the atmosphere is greening the planet. Plants

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are expanding and growing bigger and faster, because of the temperate climate and more food (CO2) available. This, in conjunction with better cropping producing techniques, is what is allowing humankind to grow at its present rate without collapsing. There has been no more food available in the planet since the appearing of homo sapiens on it as it is today. Distribution of food is the real problem.

Cheers

Guillermo Gefaell

September 22, 2010 at 12:18 AM 

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Activist Teacher: CO2 emission from fossil fuel burning is not more than from breathing

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