

# GLOBAL WARMING: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND SOLUTION

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**Abstract:** Many researchers, engineers and environmentalists are expressing deep concerns about changes in the overall climate of the planet. Fossil fuels are being continuously used to produce electricity. The burning of these fuels produces gases like carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxides which lead to global warming. Deforestation is also leading to warmer temperatures. The hazard of global warming is continuously causing major damage to the Earth's environment. Most people are still unaware of global warming and do not consider it to be a big problem in years to come. What most people do not understand is that global warming is currently happening, and we are already experiencing some of its withering effects. It is and will severely affect ecosystems and disturb ecological balance. Because of the treacherous effects of global warming, some solutions must be devised. The paper introduces global warming, elaborates its causes and hazards and presents some solutions to solve this hot issue. Above all, alternative energy sources (solar, wind, hydro, geothermal, bio mass) need to be seriously pursued. Finding and using renewable sources of energy is one of the methods to combat the ever increasing global warming effectively

**Keywords:** Climate, fossil fuels, deforestation, global warming, alternative energy sources

## I. Introduction

The continuous rise in temperature of the planet is really upsetting. The root cause for this is global warming. Global warming begins when sunlight reaches the Earth. The clouds, atmospheric particles, reflective ground surfaces and surface of oceans then sends back about 30 % of sunlight back into the space, whilst the remaining is absorbed by oceans, air and land. This consequently heats up the surface of the planet and atmosphere, making life feasible. As the Earth warms up, this solar energy is radiated by thermal radiation and infrared rays, propagating directly out to space thereby cooling the Earth. However, some of the outgoing radiation is re-absorbed by carbon dioxide, water vapors, ozone, methane and other gases in the atmosphere and is radiated back to the surface of Earth. These gases are commonly known as greenhouse gases due to their heat-trapping capacity. It must be noted that this re-absorption process is actually good as the Earth's average surface temperature would be very cold if there was no existence of greenhouse gases. The dilemma began when the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere was artificially increased by humankind at an alarming rate since the past two centuries. As of 2004, over 8 billion tons of carbon dioxide was pumped thermal radiation is further hindered by increased levels of greenhouse gases resulting in a phenomenon known as human enhanced global warming effect. Recent observations regarding global warming have substantiated the theory that it is indeed a human enhanced greenhouse effect that is causing the planet to heat up. The planet has experienced the largest increase in surface temperature over the last 100 years.

## II. Greenhouse Effect

While other planets in the solar system of the Earth are either roasting hot or bitterly cold, Earth's surface has relatively mild, steady temperatures. Earth enjoys these temperatures because of its atmosphere, which is the thin layer of gases that cover and protect the planet. However, 97 % of climate scientists and researchers agree that humans have changed the Earth's atmosphere in dramatic ways over the past two centuries, resulting in global warming. To understand global warming, it is first necessary to become familiar with the greenhouse effect. As Fig.1 depicts, the natural greenhouse effect normally traps some portion of heat in such a way that our planet is safe from reaching freezing temperatures while human enhanced greenhouse effect leads to global warming. This is due to burning of fossil fuels which increase the amount of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane and oxides of nitrogen) present in the atmosphere.

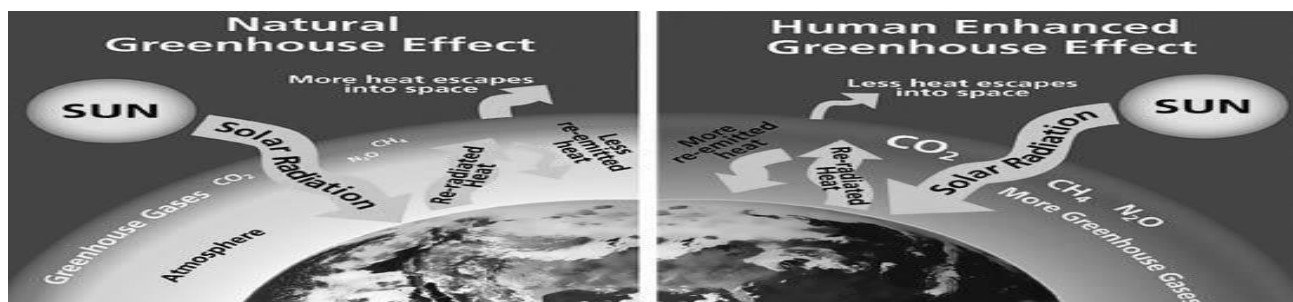


Fig.1 Types of greenhouse effects

The trade of incoming and outgoing radiation that heats up the Earth is often referred to as the greenhouse effect because a greenhouse works in a similar way (Fig.2). Incoming ultraviolet radiation easily passes through the glass walls of a greenhouse and is absorbed by the plants and hard surfaces inside. Weaker infrared radiation, however, has difficulty passing through the glass walls and is trapped inside, therefore, warming the greenhouse. This effect lets tropical plants prosper inside a greenhouse, even during a cold season.

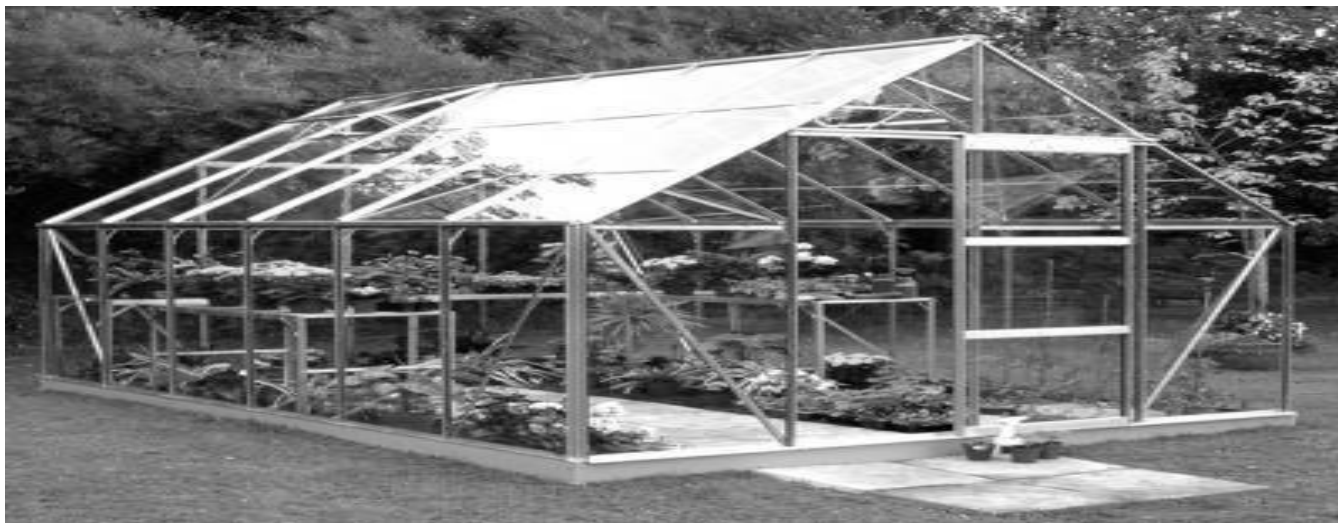


Fig. 2 Plants embodied in a greenhouse

III. Greenhouse Gases:

There are many greenhouse gases which are mainly emitted by human activity. The first and foremost in the list is carbon dioxide. Excessive burning of fossil fuels like coal and oil is the major factor for producing this gas. Moreover, deforestation i.e. removal of trees for acquiring lands also causes large amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Cement manufacture also contributes carbon dioxide to atmosphere when calcium carbonate is heated generating lime and carbon dioxide. The second culprit gas is methane, commonly known as natural gas. It is produced as a result of agricultural activities such as livestock digestion, paddy rice farming and use of manure. Methane is also produced due to improper management of waste. Nitrous oxides are generated mainly by fertilizers. Moreover, fluorinated gases such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are chiefly a result of various industrial processes and refrigeration. Fig.3 shows pictorially the distribution of greenhouse gases. These gases are playing their negative part in increasing the havoc of global warming. They are continuously causing an increase in the earth's temperature.

Annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector

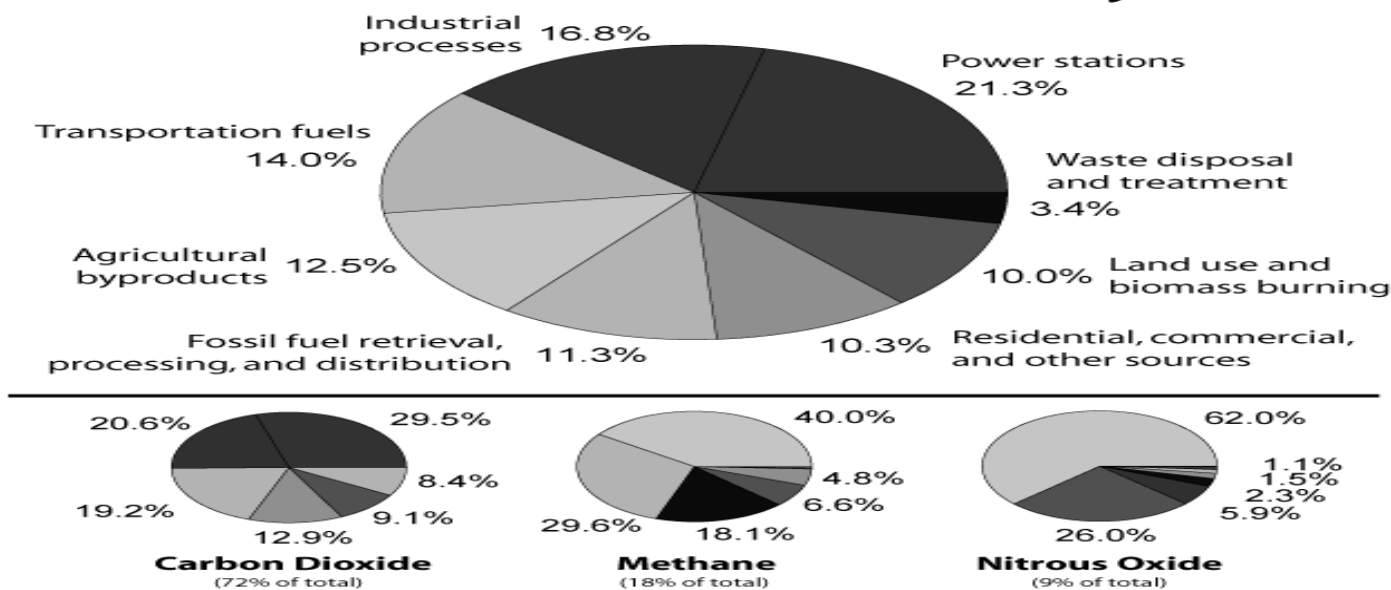


FIG.3 DISTRIBUTION OF GREENHOUSE GASES

#### IV. Causes of Global warming

The major cause of global warming is the greenhouse gases. They include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides and in some cases chlorine and bromine containing compounds. The build-up of these gases in the atmosphere changes the radiative equilibrium in the atmosphere. Their overall effect is to warm the Earth's surface and the lower atmosphere because greenhouse gases absorb some of the outgoing radiation of Earth and re-radiate it back towards the surface. The net

warming from 1850 to the end of the 20th century was equivalent to nearly  $2.5 \text{ W/m}^2$  with carbon dioxide contribution about 60 % to this figure, methane about 25 per cent, with nitrous oxides and halocarbons providing the remainder. In 1985, Joe Farman, of the British Antarctic Survey, published an article showing the decrease in ozone levels over Antarctica during the early 1980s. The response was striking: large scale international scientific programmes were mounted to prove that CFCs (used as aerosol propellants in industrial cleaning fluids and in refrigeration tools) were the cause of the problem. Even more important was abrupt international action to curb the emissions of CFCs. The second major cause of global warming is the depletion of ozone layer. This happens mainly due to the presence of chlorine-containing source gases. When ultraviolet light is present, these gases dissociate releasing chlorine atoms which then catalyses ozone destruction. Aerosols present in the atmosphere are also causing global warming by changing the climate in two different ways. Firstly, they scatter and absorb solar and infrared radiation and secondly, they may alter the microphysical and chemical properties of clouds and perhaps affect their lifetime and extent. The scattering of solar radiation acts to cool the planet, while absorption of solar radiation by aerosols warms the air directly instead of permitting sunlight to be absorbed by the surface of the Earth.

**V. Global Warming:** The Effects Predicting the consequences of global warming is one of the most difficult tasks faced by the climate researchers. This is due to the fact that natural processes that cause rain, snowfall, hailstorms, rise in sea levels is reliant on many diverse factors. Moreover, it is very hard to predict the size of emissions of greenhouse gases in the future years as this is determined majorly through technological advancements and political decisions. Global warming produces many negative effects some of which are described here. Firstly, extra water vapor which is present in the atmosphere falls again as rain which leads to floods in various regions of the world. When the weather turns warmer, evaporation process from both land and sea rises. This leads to drought in the regions where increased evaporation process is not compensated by increased precipitation. In some areas of the world, this will result in crop failure and famine particularly in areas where the temperatures are already high. The extra water vapor content in the atmosphere will fall again as extra rain hence causing flood. Towns and villages which are dependent on the melting water from snowy mountains may suffer drought and scarcity of water supply. It is because the glaciers all over the world are shrinking at a very rapid rate and melting of ice appears to be faster than previously projected. According to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), about one-sixth of the total population of the world lives in the regions which shall be affected by a decrease in melting water. The warmer climate will likely cause more heat waves, more violent rainfall and also amplification in the severity of hailstorms and thunderstorms. Rising of sea levels is the most deadly affect of global warming, the rise in temperature is causing the ice and glaciers to melt rapidly. This will lead to rise of water levels in oceans, rivers and lakes

that can pilot devastation in the form of floods [6]. As evident from Fig. 5, temperature anomalies are projected to increase in coming years. Before, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the situation was well under control but the beginning of the current century.

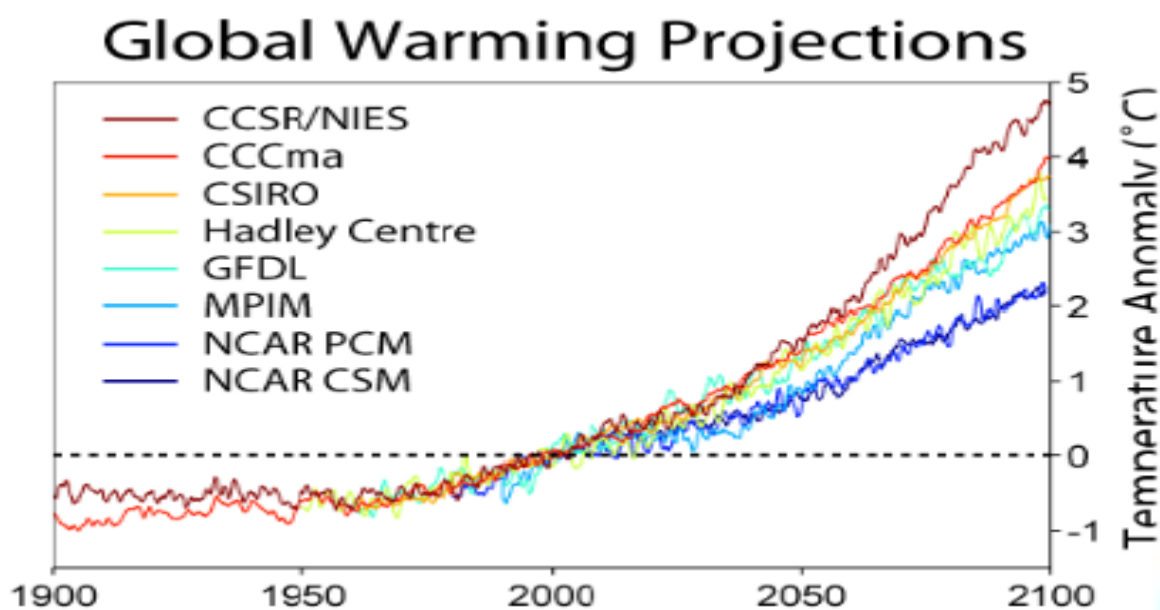


Fig. 5 Global warming projections by various

Science and Engineering research agencies

## VI. Effects on Living Beings

Global warming can severely affect the health of living beings. Excess heat can cause stress which may lead to blood pressure and heart diseases. Crop failures and famines, which are a direct consequence of heating up of earth, can cause a decline in human body resistance to viruses and infections. Global warming may also transfer various diseases to other regions as people will shift from regions of higher temperatures to regions of comparatively lower temperatures. Warmer oceans and other surface waters may lead to severe cholera outbreaks and harmful infections in some types of sea food. Moreover, it is an established fact that warmer temperatures lead to dehydration which is a major cause of kidney stones. A medical team from The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia examined the health proceedings of more than 60,000 Americans alongside weather records. They discovered that individuals were most likely to be hospitalized with kidney stones three days after a temperature rise. Since 1994, kidney stone incidence has risen from about one in 20 people to one in 11. This trend is likely to increase as the globe gets hotter. According to Luis Ostrosky, M.D. of the Division of Infectious Diseases at The University of Texas Health Science Centre at Houston Medical School and medical director for epidemiology at Memorial Hermann-Texas Medical Centre:

## VII. Alternative Energy Sources

The hazards caused by global warming are tremendous. Excessive use of fossil fuels such as coal, natural gas and oil play a part in it too. The usage of fossil fuels should be discontinued immediately. The most significant solution to put an end to this disaster is the use of alternative energy sources. They include wind, solar, bio mass, geothermal and hydro. The most noteworthy point in using these sources is their clean nature. They do not produce any sort of pollution or toxic gases that can lead to global warming. They are environmentally friendly and pose no threat to ecological balance. However, their high installation and setup costs may drive energy companies away from them at first but in the long run they are surely beneficial for everyone. Most importantly, fossil fuels will deplete one day and sooner or later, we have to turn to renewable energy sources for energy production. Thus, the eventual solution to end global warming is to use alternative energy sources. Fig. 9 depicts in a pictorial way that earth can be saved from the hazards of global warming if we utilise renewable energy sources.

## VIII. Conclusion

The scientific and environmental community is on the same page regarding the bitter reality of global warming and the involvement of human factor in it. The paper discussed here has only dented the surface of what is a very intricate line of scientific and engineering exploration. Global warming is a big hazard and appropriate measures must be taken to tackle this serious problem. This problem is not only causing trouble to the human beings but also to animals and plants. Melting of polar ice caps will lead to floods which can cause mayhem everywhere. Rise of sea levels will devastate agricultural and fishing activities. To embark upon these problems, some remedial steps must be timely taken which include but are not limited to the use of renewable sources of energy and stopping deforestation. Innovative solutions must be brought forward to end this hazard once and forever.

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