

# The Carbon Dioxide Problem and You

**Jerry Hannan, PhD**

*Publication Date:*  
*Summer 91 - Volume 22 #3*

*Document ID: HANNA001*



Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology

Cardinal Rigali Center • 20 Archbishop May Drive • Suite 3400-A • St. Louis, Missouri 63119 • USA  
314.792.7220 • [www.faithscience.org](http://www.faithscience.org) • E-mail: [mariannepost@archstl.org](mailto:mariannepost@archstl.org)

There can be conflicting projections about the effects of increasing the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere, but there is a certainty that each of us contributes to the problem. Here is a summary of facts which can be easily verified by any person having access to the scientific literature.

1. The atmosphere currently contains about 375 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub>, which is less than 0.04%. The CO<sub>2</sub> content of a person's breath, however, is close to 5% so we are constantly contributing to the problem. Each person exhales approximately 600 liters of CO<sub>2</sub> per day.
2. According to the Congressional Research Service, the average car uses 507 gallons of gasoline per year, and each gallon produces about 19 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> during the combustion process. Therefore, an average car produces close to 5 tons of carbon dioxide in a year's time.
3. Nature's way of absorbing CO<sub>2</sub> and producing oxygen is by the process of photosynthesis. Based on literature data for "temperate grasslands," a person's lawn would have to cover more than 1.5 acres to absorb the combined production of CO<sub>2</sub>, by his breath and his car. Neglected in all of these considerations are the CO<sub>2</sub> production by airplanes, lawn mowers, trucks, ships, cows, etc., so it is no wonder that the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the air is increasing steadily.
4. An interesting sidelight to this problem is the enormous amount of herbicides used for agricultural purposes each year.

Perhaps the control of weeds leads to a net gain in photosynthesis (maybe someone has made an estimate of this), but certain weeds have considerably higher growth rates than other plants, so it is conceivable that their control runs counter to the problem of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. A shocking statistic is that the leading herbicide in terms of sales is atrazine; each year almost 100,000,000 pounds of this compound are sold, close to a half pound per person in the United States.

In view of the above it is not surprising that the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere has been increasing steadily. As supposedly informed people, we probably should be giving serious thought to the consequences.