

Opinion

Letter: Burning of fossil fuels is heating up our planet

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Burning of fossil fuels is heating up our planet

A recent letter seeking an open discussion regarding climate change contained misconceptions about climate change and the science behind it. This requires a response.

Greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide, trap heat in Earth's atmosphere, and help maintain a livable climate. Scientists have identified natural changes in both atmospheric carbon dioxide and climate that occurred during the past several hundred thousand years. Consistently, cold climates had low CO₂ levels, while warm climates had high CO₂ levels. Remarkably, the minimum and maximum levels of carbon dioxide remained nearly constant over several hundred millennia.

The maximum CO₂ level and a warm climate persisted during the past 10,000 years in which agriculture developed and human civilization thrived. Currently, however, the atmosphere contains excess carbon dioxide, 40 percent higher than the natural maximum level, and the planet is heating up.

Carbon dioxide emissions from energy production have increased rapidly worldwide, especially since the late 1970s. Scientific studies show that the burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil, natural gas – to produce energy is responsible for the excess carbon dioxide. As a result, the planet is now experiencing excess warming due to unnatural causes, i.e., humans burning fossil fuels.

Based on sound science in studies performed around the world, 196 countries at the recent U.N. Climate Conference in Paris unanimously agreed on the need to cut carbon dioxide pollution from burning fossil fuels in order to curb global warming, stabilize the climate and provide a livable planet for present and future generations.

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Snyder