



# FOSSIL FUELS: THE GREENEST ENERGY

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What if I told you that someone had developed an energy source that could help us solve our biggest environmental challenges, purify our water and air, make our cities and homes more sanitary, and keep us safe from potential catastrophic climate change? What if I also told you that this energy source was cheap, plentiful, and reliable?

Well, there is such a source. You probably know it as fossil fuel. Oil. Natural gas. Coal.

But wait? Don't fossil fuels pollute our environment and make our climate unlivable? That, of course, is what we're told...and what our children are taught. But let's look at the data. Here's a graph you've probably never seen: the correlation between use of fossil fuels and access to clean water. More fossil fuel. More clean water. Am I saying the more we that we have used fossil fuel, the cleaner our water has become? Yes, that's exactly what I'm saying.

In the developed world, we take clean water for granted. We turn on a tap and it's there. But getting it there takes a massive amount of energy. Think of the man-made reservoirs, the purification plants, the network of pipes. In the undeveloped world, it's a much different story. They lack the energy, so they lack clean water. More fossil fuel. More clean water.

The same is true of sanitation. By the use of cheap, plentiful, and reliable energy from fossil fuels, we have made our environment cleaner. Take a look at this graph. More fossil fuel. Better sanitation.

Okay, what about air quality? Here's a graph of the air pollution trends in the United States over the last half century based on data from the Environmental Protection Agency. Note the dramatic downward trend in emissions, even though we use more fossil fuel than ever. How was this achieved? Above all, by using anti-pollution technology powered by...fossil fuel: oil, natural gas and coal.

But even without modern pollution control technology, fossil fuel makes our air cleaner. Indoor pollution—caused by burning a fire inside your house, cabin, hut or tent to cook and keep warm—was a deadly global problem until the late 19th century when cheap kerosene, a fossil fuel byproduct, became available in America and Europe. Indoor pollution is still a major issue in the developing world today. The best solution? Fossil fuel.

And now we come to the biggest fossil fuel concern of all—global warming. On this very sensitive topic we need to get our terms straight: There is a big difference between mild global warming and catastrophic global warming. We can all agree on that, right? The issue isn't: does burning fossil fuel have some warming impact? It does. The issue is: is the climate

warming dangerously fast?

In 1986 NASA climate scientist James Hansen—one of the world’s most prominent critics of the use of fossil fuels—predicted that “if current trends are unchanged,” temperatures would rise 2 to 4 degrees in the first decade of the 2000s. But as you can see from this graph, since 2000 the trend line is essentially flat—little or no warming in the last 15 years. That’s probably why we hear much less talk about “global warming” and much more talk about “climate change.”

Has this “climate change” made our world more dangerous? The key statistic here, one that is, unfortunately, almost never mentioned, is “climate-related deaths,” that is, how many people die each year from a climate-related cause, including droughts, floods, storms, and extreme temperatures. In the last eighty years, as CO2 emissions have rapidly escalated, the annual rate of climate-related deaths worldwide has rapidly declined -- by 98%.

The reason is that the energy from fossil fuel has allowed the developed world to build a durable civilization, one highly resilient to extreme heat, extreme cold, floods, storms, and so on. The developing world—where natural disasters can still wreak terrible havoc—would like the chance to do the same. But to do that they will need a lot more energy. The cheapest, fastest and easiest way to get that energy is from fossil fuels.

In sum, fossil fuels don’t take a naturally safe environment and make it dangerous; they empower us to take a naturally dangerous environment and make it cleaner and safer.

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