
Science Supports Global Phase Out of Coal in 20-25 Years

The following excerpts are from Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?, published in the Open Atmosphere Science Journal by James Hansen et al in 2008.

Excerpt:

A practical global strategy almost surely requires a rising global price on CO₂ emissions and phase-out of coal use except for cases where the CO₂ is captured and sequestered. The carbon price should eliminate use of unconventional fossil fuels, unless, as is unlikely, the CO₂ can be captured. A reward system for improved agricultural and forestry practices that sequester carbon could remove the current CO₂ overshoot. With simultaneous policies to reduce non-CO₂ greenhouse gases, it appears still feasible to avert catastrophic climate change.

Present policies, with continued construction of coal-fired power plants without CO₂ capture, suggest that decision-makers do not appreciate the gravity of the situation. We must begin to move now toward the era beyond fossil fuels. Continued growth of greenhouse gas emissions, for just another decade, practically eliminates the possibility of near-term return of atmospheric composition beneath the tipping level for catastrophic effects.

The most difficult task, phase-out over the next 20-25 years of coal use that does not capture CO₂, is Herculean, yet feasible when compared with the efforts that went into World War II. The stakes, for all life on the planet, surpass those of any previous crisis. The greatest danger is continued ignorance and denial, which could make tragic consequences unavoidable.