Carbon Emissions

Can zero emissions ever be realistically achieved?

Whether we take notice of current affairs or not, the question of carbon emissions and what to do about them is a frequent topic of world news. The majority of ordinary people would agree that something must be done to reduce pollution in any form; and particularly those invisible, and sometimes very visible, kinds affecting air quality. Factories belching smoke and toxic gases, coal-fired power stations and vehicle exhaust fumes clearly need to be eliminated eventually. They, apparently, have been and still are responsible for global warming and deterioration of the ozone layer; at least, so we are informed by scientific experts and conservationists. Unfortunately, out of sight is often out of mind; so while just a concerned minority wages campaigns for action, the silent majority adopts the attitude that here is an issue beyond the scope of normal folk and definitely a problem for governments.

Our leaders do take the matter seriously; otherwise they wouldn't bother attending conferences where promises of achieving zero emissions by a specific date are bandied around like bids at an auction. Presumably, they actually believe their claims; despite commonsense suggesting them to be financially crippling and grossly exaggerated. Why exaggerated, you might think? I'll try to explain.

Carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide would seem to be two of the main culprits; and if we can stop producing them the world ought to be a better place. Therefore it follows that we just need to pinpoint the sources of pollution and prevent these dangerous gases escaping. Starting with the factories, they being the main manufacturers of pretty much everything we humans use and need to survive, there are ways to power them without using fossil fuels: greener methods such as solar, wind and hydro are being gradually introduced. Implemented on a global scale, that should eventually take care of one cause of pollution; always assuming that every single country on Earth is willing to participate and can come up with the money to make their side of things happen.

Another consideration is transport: planes, cars, buses, trains, trucks, boats, motor bikes, and so on. Not a problem – switch to electric. This, of course, is going to cost everyone, even those who use push bikes or walk everywhere. We are coming to accept that the days of petrol and diesel fuels are numbered; and it will be a hard pill to swallow. Most families in developed countries seem to have at least one car, and in many instances they are an essential. However, unless there is a financially viable way of converting the current vehicles to battery-powered, the owners of said vehicles will have no option but to ditch the old and buy new. Hopefully there will be enough charging stations around to keep these mobile. Drivers living in big cities and even smaller towns should be okay; but what about countries like Australia where distances between populated communities may be 200 kilometres or more? As for country roads and desert regions, I can't imagine

governments going to the expense of putting charging units and running power to them in the middle of nowhere just for the odd truck or car to plug in. Then again, I suppose they might dip into the public purse, just to prove a political point. As for what I said about everyone paying the price, the extra expense of going electric will affect the cost of everything we buy; and that will include seafood, always assuming fishing boats can swap their diesel engines for electric. On an even broader scale, imagine trying to implement such changes in India and Africa - it would be a financial and logistical nightmare.

We are all aware that plants and trees absorb carbon dioxide from the air and expel oxygen; at least during daylight hours when photosynthesis is possible. Farming practices in the past have denuded vast areas, felling trees to make way for crops and stock grazing; but re-planting sufficient new trees to compensate will take years, and any significant benefit won't be noticeable for decades. Even so, it needs to be done, and this brings to mind the issue of wildfires. The more trees we have, the more are likely to go up in smoke. We've seen how devastating bushfires are and can only guess the amount of carbon gases they distribute into the atmosphere. Even controlled burning during cooler months causes pollution; but not doing it at all as some factions would advocate is a recipe for future disaster.

Trees aren't the only living things that affect the environment, though. Consider the fact that both animals and humans inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. How many trillions of creatures would *that* be contributing to atmospheric pollution? And on a less-pleasant note, flatulence produced by humans and cattle on a massive scale just adds to the problem in the form of methane, yet another hydrocarbon. How is any government going to legislate to fix that?

I could go on, but there are others who are writing tomes on the same subject and this article is merely a snippet highlighting an enormous issue which is seemingly impossible to resolve, certainly in the near future anyway. All we as ordinary people can do to help is look to our own lifestyle and try to ensure we don't make matters worse; and, of course, encourage our governments to research new ways for combating carbon emissions; then co-operate with their suggestions and requests.

In closing, I have to say that I am unlikely to be around to witness all but a few of the changes necessary to reduce carbon emissions, and I think I am glad of that. In my humble opinion, hard decisions and sacrifices will have to be made; but hopefully not without consideration for compromise. If the human race truly is here to stay, no solution can ever be perfect, so future generations will have to accept that whatever comes to pass may only be as good as it gets.