

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

(E)

September 17, 1969

FOR JOHN EHRLICHMAN

As with so many of the more interesting environmental questions, we really don't have very satisfactory measurements of the carbon dioxide problem. On the other hand, this very clearly is a problem, and, perhaps most particularly, is one that can seize the imagination of persons normally indifferent to projects of apocalyptic change.

The process is a simple one. Carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has the effect of a pane of glass in a greenhouse. The CO₂ content is normally in a stable cycle, but recently man has begun to introduce instability through the burning of fossil fuels. At the turn of the century several persons raised the question whether this would change the temperature of the atmosphere. Over the years the hypothesis has been refined, and more evidence has come along to support it. It is now pretty clearly agreed that the CO₂ content will rise 25% by 2000. This could increase the average temperature near the earth's surface by 7 degrees Fahrenheit. This in turn could raise the level of the sea by 10 feet. Goodbye New York. Goodbye Washington, for that matter. We have no data on Seattle.

It is entirely possible that there will be countervailing effects. For example, an increase of dust in the atmosphere would tend to lower temperatures, and might offset the CO₂ effect. Similarly, it is possible to conceive fairly mammoth man-made efforts to countervail the CO₂ rise. (E. g., stop burning fossil fuels.)

In any event, I would think this is a subject that the Administration ought to get involved with. It is a natural for NATO. Perhaps the first order of business is to begin a worldwide monitoring system. At present, I believe only the United States is doing any serious monitoring, and we have only one or two stations.

Hugh Heffner knows a great deal about this, as does also the estimable Bob White, head of the U. S. Weather Bureau. (Teddy White's brother.)

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