Skeptical Science *Learn Offline*

Is CO2 a pollutant?

What The Science Says:
A single substance can be both a pollutant and a non-pollutant. It all depends on context.

Climate Myth: CO2 is not a pollutant
'To suddenly label CO2 as a "pollutant" is a disservice to a gas that has played an enormous role in the development and sustainability of all life on this wonderful Earth. Mother Earth has clearly ruled that CO2 is not a pollutant.' (Robert Balling, as quoted by Popular Technology)

Most people intuitively understand what pollution is. Furthermore, a substance that causes pollution is called a pollutant. Although many substances are either a pollutant or they aren't, some can paradoxically be both: it all depends on context.

No-one, for example, would argue against the fact that nitrogen is an essential nutrient for crops, yet too much of it (through agricultural runoff and fossil-fuel burning) can deplete oceans of oxygen and cause other harmful effects on ecosystems.

A similar line of reasoning can be brought to CO2. It's essential for life - keeping the planet from freezing, growing plants etc - yet too much can upset the Earth's natural balance and cause ocean acidification and global wa

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Skeptical Science explains the science of global warming and examines climate misinformation through the lens of peer-reviewed research. The website won the Australian Museum 2011 Eureka Prize for the Advancement of Climate Change Knowledge. Members of the Skeptical Science team have authored peer-reviewed papers, a college textbook on climate change and the book Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand. Skeptical Science content has been used in university courses, textbooks, government reports on climate change, television documentaries and numerous books.