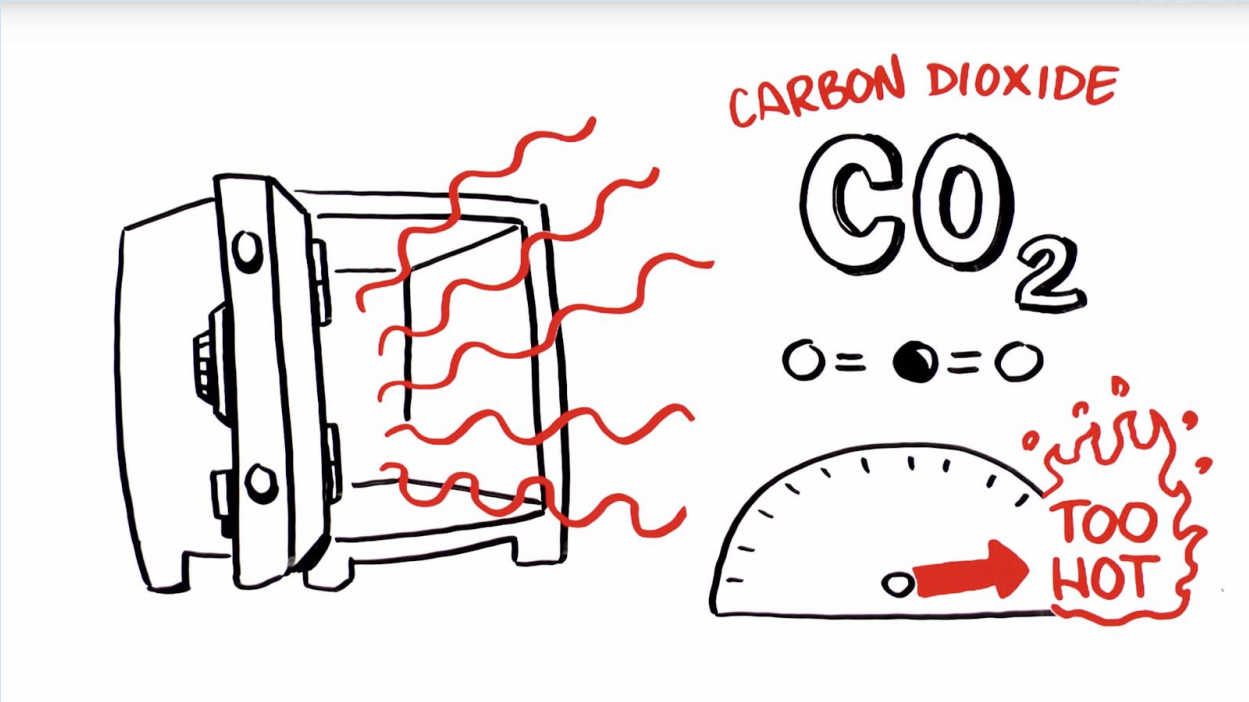
NASA's Earth Minute: Gas Problem



The Earth's atmosphere is a mixture of gasses. Some are known as greenhouse gases. That's because they trap heat from the sun and warm the Earth. That's good, because without greenhouse gases, our planet would freeze and life as most of us know it would be impossible.

These greenhouse gases – mainly water vapor and carbon dioxide naturally cycle between the land and atmosphere and ocean. And over the ages, these greenhouse gases have reached a delicate balance that results in temperatures that we like. A lot.

It's been that way for thousands of years. Until the last 150 years. That's when people began burning fossil fuels. Those fossil fuels – coal, oil, natural gas – contain carbon that's been locked away from the natural cycle for eons. But when we burn them, that carbon joins with oxygen to make carbon dioxide that goes into the atmosphere. It throws the natural balance out of whack.

The more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the more heat that is trapped. And the warmer it gets. And the warmer it gets, the more the climate changes. And the higher the ocean will rise. The more we learn about carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, the better we can deal with the changes caused by global warming.

Because good planets are hard to find!