UCI Earth system scientist helps quantify drop in carbon emissions during pandemic

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Brian Bell
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Reduced transportation emissions due to the worldwide COVID-19 lockdown have caused a global decline of about 9 percent in atmospheric carbon dioxide compared to 2019 – and produced clear skies over the Los Angeles Basin.

Picture Credit:
Steve Zylius / UCI

Scientists who normally study how human activities impact the planet have been given a rare opportunity over the past few months to observe what happens when industry, transportation and other sources of carbon emissions are curtailed. Steve Davis, UCI associate professor of Earth system science, is part of an international cohort of researchers measuring the unprecedented dip in CO2 pollution during the worldwide lockdown made necessary by the COVID-19 pandemic. An article in *Nature* describing his group's project and a second complementary study highlights Davis' insight into the current shutdown compared to conditions after the financial market collapse of 2008. He says that one standout difference is that "people still drove during the 2008 economic recession, but they're not driving now." This shows

up as a decline in U.S. transportation sector CO2 emissions from just under 6 megatons per day in January and February to about 2 megatons per day in April. So far in 2020, the scientists are seeing a global drop in carbon emissions of roughly 9 percent from 2019, the largest decline since World War II. “Will the governments in charge of the world’s industrial economies revert back to business as usual when the pandemic scare is over,” Davis said, “or try to use it as a springboard to a clean energy future?”

Davis was a participant in a UCI Compelling Conversations panel discussion on COVID-19 and the climate that’s available now on YouTube (https://youtu.be/VL_990HwXvg).

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