

Wildfires can wipe out Calif. greenhouse gas gains

By David R. Baker, San Francisco Chronicle

Most years, the amount of greenhouse gases spewed by California's cars, factories and power plants drops slightly – a hard-won result of the state's fight against global warming.

And in any given year, one big wildfire can wipe out that progress.

Over the course of just a few weeks, a major fire can pump more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than California's many climate change programs can save in 12 months. Scientists debate whether California's vast forests are emitting more carbon dioxide through fires than they absorb through plant growth.

As global warming raises temperatures, making fires like the ones that tore through the Wine Country last month more likely, it could turn into a vicious cycle.

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