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Oceanography and Atmospheric Sci. Atmospheric Physics

**Aviation and the Environment: Aviation's Effects on the Global Atmosphere Are Potentially Significant and Expected to Grow**

Authors: [GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE WASHINGTON DC RESOURCES COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DIV](#)

**Abstract:** Concerns about global warming are focusing increasingly on the contribution of human activities, including aviation. **Jet** aircraft are among many sources of greenhouse gases-gases that can trap heat, potentially increasing the temperature of the earth's surface and leading to changes in climate." According to a recent report by the National Research Council, the average global temperature at the earth's surface has risen 0.7 to 1.4 degrees Fahrenheit over the last century. Many experts agree that, in total, greenhouse gases are warming the earth and that this warming could have harmful effects on the environment and human health. For example, some scientists are concerned that with global warming, glaciers and ice sheets could melt, leading to a rise in sea levels and subsequent coastal flooding. In addition, they expressed concern that the incidence of malaria and other tropical infectious diseases could increase in moderate climates. Our report focuses on the effects of subsonic **jet** aircraft engine **emissions** on the upper atmosphere-above 3,000 feet- and does not address the effects of these **emissions** on local air quality. A recent international review of aviation and the global atmosphere had a similar focus. We focused on commercial civilian subsonic **jet** aircraft because they account for the majority of aviation **emissions**; military and general aviation aircraft account for the remainder. In the commercial fleet, fewer than 15 civilian supersonic **jets** currently operate worldwide. Throughout this report, we use the terms "aviation" and "**jet** aircraft" interchangeably reconciling Observations of Global Temperature Change, Panel on Reconciling Temperature Observations, National Research Council (Jan. 2000).

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