



Geogenic CO₂-Exhalations and Vegetation: Its possible use to predict volcanic eruptions

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Mofettes (or natural CO₂ springs, NCDS) are geogenic CO₂-emissions consisting of pure gaseous carbon dioxide sometimes contaminated with traces of CO, CH₄ or even H₂S. Independent of the origin of the CO₂ (which may be earth mantle or crust) the emitted gas influences organismic life on the earth surface. After leaving the soil medium, the gas is either immediately diluted by winds and therefore has no direct consequences for life, or, as CO₂ is heavier than air, it forms transient gas lakes (depending on surface morphology) greatly influencing life in the surroundings of the vents. Above concentrations of 8-10% CO₂ irritates animals leading to a loss in consciousness and to death because of anoxia or acidosis if concentrations exceed 15-20%. Plants are not that sensitive and some species are able to tolerate CO₂ concentrations as high as 100% for a certain period. Several distinct plant species are indicative for mofette fields and for changes within the emission regime. Sometimes mofettes can therefore be distinguished from their surroundings due to their specific "azonal" vegetation regime. In some special mofettes, plants form concentric rings around the CO₂ vents which correlate with the CO₂ concentration within the rooting zone. Aside from changes in species composition, plants occurring within mofettes reveal differences in habitus and growth. The closer the plants grow to the emitting CO₂ vents the smaller they get. Growth reduction is often accompanied by a slight chlorosis. Plants also react physiologically to changes in atmospheric/geogenic CO₂. At concentrations between 0 and 3000 ppm plants increase photosynthesis with increasing CO₂. Yet, when CO₂ concentrations reach the percentage range (5-10%) photosynthesis gets reduced. A further increase in carbon dioxide may lead to a total

(but mostly transient) loss of photosynthesis. This is the case in and around mofettes where CO₂ concentrations may far exceed 90%.

Plants can react in two main ways to geogenic CO₂ extremes: (i) with fast physiological/biochemical reactions e.g. photosynthesis or respiration; reactions that are obvious and can be monitored within a few minutes to hours using special equipment and (ii) with slow reactions like chlorosis or changes in growth; reactions that will be evident after days/weeks or months. There is some evidence in E-Germany (Vogtland) and NW-Czech Republic (Cheb basin) that pre-volcanic events and pre-earthquake events may change the geogenic gas composition and the overall CO₂ gas flux to the atmosphere. If this change would be large enough, vegetation could be used to monitor or indicate volcanic eruptions and earthquake related reactions.