

CANADA

CLIMATE AND ENERGY MYTHS VS. FACTS



What are the tar sands?

Canadian tar sands deposits are found primarily under Alberta's Boreal forest and wetlands in an area about the size of Florida. In order to access them, millions of acres of pristine forest and wildlife habitat have to be strip-mined and drilled, destroying these areas and severely disrupting critical terrestrial carbon reservoirs in the peatlands of the Boreal forest. Because it requires large amounts of energy, production of synthetic crude oil from tar sands is estimated to release at least three times the greenhouse gas emissions per barrel as compared to production of conventional crude oil.

Canadian politicians and oil companies have been working hard to convince the U.S. and other countries that credible steps are being taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This despite the fact that Canada has weak climate and energy regulations and is encouraging expansion of the high-carbon tar sands oil industry. Canadian politicians and oil companies claim that the tar sands are an “ethical,” regulated source of oil. Yet a closer look at the actual rules in place in Canada reveals a different story. This fact sheet rebuts some of the common myths about energy and climate in Canada.



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Canada is not on track to meet its Copenhagen target

Canada is on track for a 7% increase in emissions by 2020, not a 17% decrease: Canada's federal government has repeatedly claimed that it's on track to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 17% below 2005 levels by 2020.¹ However, studies have shown that, with existing federal and provincial measures, Canada's emissions will be an estimated 7% **above** 2005 levels by 2020.² Recent government data also shows that Canada will soar past its Copenhagen target by 178 million tonnes and predicts emissions will continue to climb as the country recovers from the recession.³

Canada is not phasing out coal-fired electricity

Coal regulations have not been put in place, and the draft version is a far cry from a coal phase-out: There are currently no federal regulations to limit the greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants. The draft regulations released in the fall of 2010, if adopted, would allow existing coal plants to **continue polluting at current levels** for decades. It would only apply to new plants **after** 2015, ignoring ones currently seeking approval, and very old plants (over 45 years). It does not require a phase-out of coal power, but a reduction in emissions to the level of natural gas and only for those plants to which it will apply.

Tar sands greenhouse gas emissions are increasing

Tar sands emissions have more than doubled since 1990⁴, and are expected to triple between now and 2020⁵: The government touts a 39% decrease in emissions per barrel of tar sands oil.⁶ But the total amount of heat-trapping gases released into the atmosphere by the industry has soared due to rising production, and that is what matters for climate change. Carbon intensity has remained roughly the same over the last five years according to the federal government⁷, and Environment Canada has acknowledged that the trend of decreasing emissions intensity "may be reversed in coming years".⁸ The projected tripling of tar sands production between now and 2025 will mean emissions continue to rise.⁹

Tar sands are not regulated

There are no effective limits on greenhouse gas, air or water pollution from the tar sands: A recent expert science panel report¹⁰ on tar sands found that the Canadian federal government has authority to regulate tar sands, but that they have not been doing so.¹¹ The Canadian federal Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development¹² and a government-appointed independent panel of scientists to study water monitoring of tar sands impacts also concluded that there was a lack of regulation, enforcement and monitoring of tar sands pollution.¹³ Neither the federal nor Alberta governments have placed limits on water and air pollution, or mandated greenhouse gas reductions from the tar sands industry.

Tar sands are not "ethical oil"

Several lawsuits have been filed by First Nations alleging that tar sands development is infringing on their rights, and communities downstream from the tar sands are dealing with elevated rates of cancer: The "ethical oil" label is the latest public relations spin by government and industry on tar sands oil. Yet, as the fastest growing source of global warming pollution in a world threatened with catastrophic climate change, escalating tar sands production is anything but ethical. The impacts on First Nations rights, toxic tailings lakes leaking dangerous chemicals and risk to birds and other wildlife also make the "ethical" claim questionable.

The tar sands are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions

When the total emissions from producing and burning tar sands are considered, the amount the industry is responsible for is equivalent to 37% of Canada's annual total emissions: Canadian government and tar sands oil industry representatives often say that the tar sands only accounts for 5% of Canada's emissions. The full impact of the industry on global warming needs to include refining and burning the fuel, much of which happens in the U.S. The industry is responsible for roughly 275 million tonnes per year when the emissions from burning the oil are factored in, 37% of Canada's total emissions or 16% of U.S. coal emissions.

Tar sands production on track to triple

Tar sands production is also rapidly expanding, and the federal government estimates that emissions from production alone will account for 95% of the growth in Canada's industrial emissions between 2006 and 2020.¹⁴ And, by 2025, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers expects to nearly triple production to 3.5 million barrels per day. Producing and burning this amount of tar sands oil will generate about 2.2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each day, and over 800 million tonnes each year. Tar sands would be responsible for more emissions than entire countries such as Canada, the U.K., Australia and France currently produce.

Canada is not investing in clean energy

The Canadian federal government has cut support for renewable energy and continues to hand \$1.3 billion in taxpayer dollars to big oil companies each year: While individual Canadian provinces like Ontario are attracting billions of dollars in clean energy investment, the federal government has ended its support for renewable energy and failed to get rid of subsidies to fossil fuel companies. The majority of Canada's "clean energy" investment has gone into carbon capture and storage, a still unproven technology that will only serve to prolong the addiction to oil rather than transition to clean energy.



(Endnotes)

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