

# Canadian research examines effects of scientific claims on oil

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A University of Alberta researcher says people generally do not act on information about the effects fossil fuel-based products are having on the environment. And the reason, says English and film studies researcher Imre Szeman, is because of the way discussions on environmental issues are structured.

In a recently published study, Szeman says the main assumption among scientists—that with [knowledge](#) comes behavioural change—is proving to be an ineffective premise in dealing with environmental problems resulting from oil production and use.

In "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster," Szeman says there are three social narratives that prevent people from acting on the knowledge they have concerning the effects of oil on the environment: strategic realism, the notion that [oil production](#) is good because it supports [economic security](#); eco-apocalypse, which Szeman explains as our incapacity to act on knowledge we have; and technological utopianism, the belief that technology will solve environmental problems resulting from oil and its usage.

"Technological utopianism is a very bizarre narrative because there's no evidence of this fact," said Imre. "What it shows is the extent to which we place a lot of faith in narratives of progress and technology overcoming things, despite all evidence to the contrary."

Szeman adds oil use has become a deeply cultural issue and thus any

kind of solution has to be cultural, and not just infrastructure or technology-based.

"We know that [oil](#) use is damaging to the environment; we know that we should act differently, but we also know that we can't. We just try not to think of it," he said.

Provided by University of Alberta

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