

Scientists reveal how the fossil fuel industry misled the public about climate change

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An international group of scientists show that fossil fuel corporations have, for decades, denied the public's right to be accurately informed about climate change by funding efforts to deceive people about the

dangers of their product. A report illustrating how the industry "polluted the information landscape," and how the damage could be undone is published today [Monday 21 October].

The report entitled, "America misled: how the fossil fuel industry deliberately misled Americans about [climate](#) change," by academics from the universities of Bristol, UK; George Mason, U.S. and Harvard, U.S., summarizes more than a decade of peer-reviewed research, and has been published to help inform policymakers, journalists, and the public.

The report includes what the fossil fuel industry knew versus what they did, the arguments they used to seed doubt in the public, the techniques they used to create those arguments, and some strategies for combating them.

The key points in the report are:

1. Internal corporate documents show that the fossil fuel industry has known about human-caused climate change for decades. Its response was to actively arrange and fund denial and disinformation to suppress action and protect its status quo business operations.
2. As the scientific consensus on climate change emerged and strengthened, the industry and its political allies attacked the consensus and exaggerated the uncertainties.
3. The fossil fuel industry offered no consistent alternative explanation for why the climate was changing—the goal was merely to undermine support for action.
4. The strategy, tactics, infrastructure, and rhetorical arguments and techniques used by fossil fuel interests to challenge the scientific evidence of climate change—including cherry picking, fake experts, and conspiracy theories—come straight out of the tobacco industry's playbook for delaying tobacco control.

5. Informing the public about how these arguments are deceptive not only begins to correct the misconceptions, but also will make it harder for future campaigns to use these misleading tactics to confuse the public.

Professor Stephan Lewandowsky, Chair in Cognitive Psychology in the School of Psychological Science and Cabot Institute for the Environment at the University of Bristol, said: "Disinformation about climate change has a straightforward purpose—to block action on climate change. In America, it has largely succeeded, with policies to mitigate [climate change](#) blocked or delayed for decades."

Professor John Cook, at the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University, added: "Exposing and explaining the techniques used to mislead are key to inoculating the public from further industry-funded disinformation."

Geoffrey Supran, Research Associate in the Department of the History of Science at Harvard University, explained: "For 60 years, the [fossil fuel industry](#) has known about the potential global warming dangers of their products. But instead of warning the public or doing something about it, they turned around and orchestrated a massive campaign of denial and delay designed to protect profits. The evidence is incontrovertible: Exxon misled the public. Like all bad actors, they should be held accountable."

Later this week [Wednesday 23 October], the People of the State of New York will face Exxon Mobil Corporation in court. While the [legal proceedings](#) are complicated, the academics state they are underpinned by a simple truth: for decades, ExxonMobil and other fossil [fuel](#) corporations funded efforts to deceive the American people about the dangers of their product.

More information: 'America misled: how the fossil fuel industry deliberately misled Americans about climate change' by John Cook, Geoffrey Supran, Stephan Lewandowsky, Naomi Oreskes, Ed Maibach: www.climatechangecommunication...0/America_Misled.pdf

Provided by University of Bristol

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