

World thirst for oil keeps growing, with SUVs a key culprit

November 13 2019, by Angela Charlton



Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old climate activist from Sweden, sits on a catamaran docked in Hampton, Va., on Tuesday, Nov. 12, 2019. Thunberg will leave North America and begin her return trip across the Atlantic on Wednesday aboard a 48-foot (15-meter) catamaran sailboat whose passengers include an 11-month-old baby. The boat leaves little to no carbon footprint, boasting solar panels and a hydro-generators for power. (AP Photo/Ben Finley)

The world's thirst for oil will continue to grow until the 2030s, with climate-damaging emissions climbing until at least 2040—and consumers' insatiable appetite for SUVs is a big reason why.

Mounting demand for plastic is another factor. So is increasing plane travel. And the upcoming population boom in cities across Africa and Asia.

All this is according to an important global industry forecast released Wednesday by the International Energy Agency that is used as guidance by oil companies and governments. This year, amid growing pressure from young activists like Greta Thunberg and others for tougher action on emissions, the IEA's World Energy Outlook took a stronger-than-usual stand on [climate change](#).

It celebrates a growing boom in solar and [wind power](#), and urges governments to work together on changing the way we fuel our lives. And it singles out gas-guzzling SUVs for criticism.

Growing demand for SUVs in the U.S, China, Europe and elsewhere could negate all the environmental benefits of the increased use of electric cars, the report says. Because of their size, SUVs are harder to electrify than smaller vehicles.

SUVs "were the second biggest reason for global emissions growth in last 10 years, after the power sector and more than all the industrial sectors put together," IEA director Fatih Birol told reporters in Paris on Wednesday.



Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Fatih Birol speaks

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2019 in Paris. The world's thirst for oil will continue to grow until the 2030s and climate-damaging emissions will keep climbing until at least 2040—unless governments rethink how we fuel our lives, according to an important global energy industry forecast. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Energy-intensive SUVs and pickup trucks account for about two-thirds of car sales in the U.S. and only about a third in the EU, though they are steadily growing in demand in Europe too, according to industry reports. Worldwide, about 42% of cars sold last year were SUVs, Birol said.

The World Energy Outlook, which focuses on forecasting energy needs over the next 20 years, is increasingly important to governments because of its relevance to [climate policy](#).

Environmental advocates say the IEA still isn't doing enough to encourage renewable energy. Oil Change International notably criticized the IEA's "over-reliance" on natural gas as a replacement for coal, saying that will lead to "climate chaos" because gas too contributes to emissions.

As flooding in Venice hit the second-highest level ever this week, inundating St. Mark's Cathedral and grounding gondolas, the city's mayor blamed climate change. Scientists say it's difficult to pin a single such event on climate change, but that increasingly extreme weather events worldwide are linked to human-caused emissions.

The IEA said that almost 20% of the growth in last year's global energy use was "due to hotter summers pushing up demand for cooling and cold snaps leading to higher heating needs."

Based on current emissions promises by governments, the IEA forecast

global oil demand of 106.4 million barrels a day in 2040, up from 96.9 million last year. Global oil demand is due to slow in the 2030s, and coal use to shrink slightly.



Executive Director of the International Energy Agency Fatih Birol speaks Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2019 in Paris. The world's thirst for oil will continue to grow until the 2030s and climate-damaging emissions will keep climbing until at least 2040—unless governments rethink how we fuel our lives, according to an important global energy industry forecast. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Emissions will continue to rise, if more slowly than today, and won't peak before 2040.

The U.S. is central to whatever happens next. U.S. consumers and businesses were a leading source of growing oil demand last year, the IEA says. Also, the U.S. will account for 85% of the increase in global oil production by 2030, thanks to the shale boom.

Asked about President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the 2015 Paris climate accord, Birol said: "as a global issue, it's important to have concerted efforts to address climate change."

The report lays out a more ambitious forecast if governments are to meet the goals in the 2015 U.N. climate accord.

That would require a big boost in wind and solar power, the IEA says, and a new push for energy efficiency, which has slowed in recent years.

The more ambitious scenario would also require work on new coal plants in Asia to capture their emissions, or closing them early.



French President Emmanuel Macron attends the Paris Peace Forum, Tuesday, Nov. 12, 2019 in Paris. French President Emmanuel Macron is hosting an international peace forum—in the notable absence of the United States—to discuss solutions to ease the world's tensions, including fighting terrorism and climate change. (Ludovic Marin/Pool via AP)

All that would lead to a big drop in oil demand—with repercussions for oil-producing countries that depend heavily on hydrocarbon income.

The report came as activist Greta Thunberg announced she will return to Europe soon from North America on a catamaran that leaves nearly no carbon footprint, part of effort to call global attention to individuals' impact on [climate](#) change.

While the IEA said such movements and individual decisions by companies and investors "can make a major difference," it insisted that "Governments must take the lead... the greatest capacity to shape our [energy](#) destiny lies with governments."

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Citation: World thirst for oil keeps growing, with SUVs a key culprit (2019, November 13) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-11-world-thirst-oil-suvs-key.html>

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