

# The oil and gas industry has been lying about global warming for decades—accountability is long overdue

May 30 2024, by Gordon McBean

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The science is clear: the planet is warming at an alarming rate and we need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

For decades, effective actions have lagged behind the needs of the

moment. The 2022 [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#) suggested that at least part of the reason for this inaction has been "due to misinformation about [climate science](#) that has sowed uncertainty."

The full scale of this misinformation was revealed in May 2024, when the United States House Committee on Oversight and Accountability completed its three year investigation into how U.S. oil companies sought to avoid accountability for climate change.

The report—tellingly titled "[Denial, Disinformation and DoubleSpeak: Big Oil's Evolving Efforts to Avoid Accountability for Climate Change](#)"—explores Big Oil's decades-long campaign of deception and denial finding that:

"Documents demonstrate for the first time that fossil fuel companies internally do not dispute that they have understood since at least the 1960s that burning fossil fuels causes climate change and [that they] then worked for decades to undermine public understanding of this fact and to deny the underlying science."

Even with [what we know about the scale of climate misinformation](#), these findings make for truly shocking reading.

The committee found that "Big Oil's deception campaign evolved from explicit denial of the basic science underlying climate change to deception, disinformation, and doublespeak," and that the [fossil fuel industry](#) deliberately spread confusing and misleading narratives, lobbied against [climate action](#) and strategically funded under-resourced universities while silencing opposition voices.

The report concluded that, as the climate science became stronger, Big Oil shifted its strategy to one of public support for action while privately

avoiding it as part of an "elaborate campaign of deception."

While the findings of this report were centered around the U.S., it is likely that many of the same conclusions would apply here in Canada. Indeed, the 2022 IPCC report made clear that while misinformation and the deliberate undermining of science is mainly a phenomenon in the U.S., there are "similar patterns in Canada."

## **Oil and gas in Canada**

The [Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers \(CAPP\)](#) is the Canadian oil and gas industries' main lobbying body.

Its website acknowledges the existence of climate change and boldly claims that the "industry is well positioned with expertise in both science and technology to reduce emissions. The global collective challenge is to reduce GHG emissions while also meeting growing demand for affordable and reliable energy."

Meanwhile, the World Petroleum Congress—a major mouthpiece of the global oil and gas industry—[held its 24th event in Calgary in 2023 on the theme of Energy Transition: The Path to Net Zero](#).

A very different view from that of the oil and gas industry can be found in a [2021 report](#) prepared by [Environmental Defense Canada](#) and [Oil Change International](#), which assessed "the climate plans of Canadian oil and gas producers."

The report concluded that the climate plans of eight Canadian oil and gas producers are—in similar form to their U.S. counterparts—woefully lacking and at times overtly misleading.

Key conclusions of their assessment are that "Canadian oil and gas

companies have released a range of complex, misleading climate change pledges that must not be taken at face value." Moreover, "despite all the talk from Canadian oil and gas companies about climate leadership, their current business plans would fuel further climate disaster and global injustice."

## All talk

Unfortunately, it seems like this misinformation continues to have an effect.

In a [2024 study](#) by the group [Re.Climate](#), it was found that while Canadians report high levels of concern about climate change, climate denial remains persistent. The report found that "many Canadians say they do not believe we can meet our energy and climate objectives, even when they agree that climate change is a serious threat that requires concerted effort."

Moreover, there are significant differences across regions and demographics. Mirroring the U.S., Conservative voters were found to be much less concerned about climate change and less supportive of transitioning off fossil fuels. Across Canada, about 72% of Canadians are worried about climate change, with the percentage varying between 84% in Québec to just 45% in Alberta.

The persistent denial of climate change is likely the enduring result of industry misinformation, political and energy ideologies, and the actions of climate change denier groups, such as the misleadingly named [Friends of Science Society](#) which actively denies the existence of global warming.

The only way to address climate change is by tackling misinformation head on. Holding the oil and gas industry to account for decades of

deceit in the U.S. and Canada is an important first step in that process.

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