



HOW TO COMBAT THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY'S GREENWASHING OF DIRTY TECHNOLOGIES



As the collective tone in our society shifts towards renewable energy and sustainable practices, the fossil fuel industry is employing new strategies to sell oil and gas-based products to governments, companies, and consumers by marketing fossil fuel-based products and practices as clean.

What is Greenwashing?

Greenwashing is the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear to be more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it really is. This is a tactic the fossil fuel industry has used for many years that is still being used today. Blue hydrogen and chemical recycling are examples of greenwashing.

Blue Hydrogen

Hydrogen can play a role in the renewable energy transition because it does not create carbon dioxide when burned, but not all hydrogen is equal. There are various ways to produce hydrogen with varying levels of emissions. Green hydrogen, or hydrogen produced using water and electrolysis powered by renewable energy, is carbon neutral and may play a limited role in powering cement, steel, niche manufacturing, and heavy transport by sea and air. Blue hydrogen, however, is made from fracked gas and will rely on unproven carbon capture technology. Although methane does not last as long in the atmosphere as carbon dioxide (CO₂), it is much more potent of a greenhouse gas. Blue hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS) exacerbate the climate crisis by boosting oil production and prolonging the fossil fuel era.

Chemical Recycling

Chemical recycling is another example of a false solution. Chemical recycling is the process of breaking down plastics to their chemical components to create fuel, various chemicals, and more plastic through pyrolysis or gasification. Currently, most facilities in the U.S. aren't successfully recycling plastic but are still producing hazardous waste and pollution. One example is the Renewlogy plant that was built in Salt Lake City in 2018 and was supposed to turn hard-to-recycle plastics into diesel fuel. The city of Boise, Idaho was sending plastics to the plant but Renewlogy was unable to recycle them because they were contaminated. Boise now sends their mixed plastic to be burned in cement kilns resulting in more planet-warming emissions (Reuters, 2022).



Climate and Health Impacts

Burning natural gas produces greenhouse gas emissions and fuels climate change. In addition to releasing carbon dioxide (CO₂) when burned, natural gas wells and infrastructure release methane – a greenhouse gas with over 80 times the heat-trapping effect of CO₂ over the first 20 years of its life cycle – into the atmosphere, accelerating the climate crisis.

In addition to climate impacts, natural gas production and petrochemical facilities release a host of toxic chemicals into local communities that contribute to everything from respiratory diseases, to birth defects, to cancer. In practice, gas pipelines often cut through marginalized communities, disproportionately exposing low-income families and people of color to these chemicals and deepening inequity. Some examples of this include the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which had been planned to run through Indigenous land in Illinois, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the Missouri River and Mississippi Rivers; the North Brooklyn Pipeline, which if constructed will affect largely Black and Brown communities; and the Byhalia Connection Pipeline which was set to run through mostly Black communities in South Memphis (Green Matters, 2021).

Hydrogen projects that are reliant on fossil fuels increase the fossil fuel infrastructure build-out and delay the just transition to clean energy we need.

CCS offers a largely unproven and extremely expensive way to reduce emissions when just energy transition can accomplish this goal much more quickly, affordably, and at greater scale.

Fossil fuel companies in effect frame CCS as a way to continue producing and burning climate-changing oil, coal, and gas, while averting the catastrophic consequences of global warming. This is a fantasy and should be dismissed immediately. We cannot stop rising temperatures without a just transition to clean energy that rapidly reduces fossil fuel use, with or without CCS.

Actions You Can Take to Oppose False Climate Solutions in Your Community

- Educate yourself on the issues happening locally. Are there existing or proposed pieces of infrastructure near your home? Attend local township or municipal meetings, read local newspapers, and learn about what's happening nearby.
- If you find injustices or false solutions in your community, talk to your neighbors. Educate them about the issue, and gather a group of interested folks together to develop a plan.
- Begin developing your plan by setting a clear goal. What measurable objective are you trying to accomplish and by what date? What short and medium-term goals do you need to achieve in order to get to your ultimate campaign goal?
- Who is your audience? Your audience will be a critical factor in conveying the region's disinterest in the proposed build-out. Identifying who this is will take a bit of research. Keep your goal in mind, and make sure to map out the best route to stop this facility, be it through increased education or public outreach, advocacy, or delaying the permitting processes.
- Determine your strategy. Now that you have a clearly defined audience (or audiences) and know where they're situated in the region, choose the right strategy that will help convince your audience to commit to your goal.
- Determine your tactics. What are the actions you will take to win over your audience? These actions – known as “tactics” – will ultimately help you achieve your goal.

When constructing your campaign plan, it's easy to view the people and groups actively or passively opposing your goal as the enemy. We'll likely never be on the same side as the large multinational fossil fuel companies advocating for profit over people and planet, but it's crucial to attempt to understand their goals, motivations, and arguments before vilifying them. To do that, find out:

- Who will rely on the construction of this facility for short- or long-term employment? (Do not belittle this. People need to work to pay the rent, support their families, and prosper. Short-term and permanent employment with these facilities is a viable way to do that, but there is a useful distinction between the two.)
- What other employment opportunities are available for them in the area? How does the current economic system adversely affect these workers?
- What motivates them to do this job?

Opposing False Solutions through the Permitting Process

The Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act provide some protections against pollution, and in order for fossil fuel-based projects to get approved on federal, state, and local levels, companies have to apply for permits to allow the air and water pollution produced from their projects. Federal permits go through the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers, and State permits go through state agencies like the Department of Environmental Protection. Many of these permit processes have a public comment period and the ability to petition the EPA to reject a permit application (EPA.gov, 2022).

Look into your local permitting laws for opportunities to oppose these projects. The References Section of this document links some resources to get you started. Often the public can demand an Environmental Impact Statement, which is part of the National Environmental Policy Act, to help understand the true cost of these projects (EPA.gov, 2022).



Your Actions Matter

The Indigenous Environmental Network found that Indigenous resistance to fossil fuel buildout has stopped nearly 0.8 billion metric tons of carbon pollution and estimated victories from current fights could prevent another nearly 1.6 billion tons, equivalent to about 400 new coal-fired power plants (Goldtooth, et al., 2021). Preventing new fossil fuel projects, including those couched in greenwashed language as false “solutions” to the climate crisis, is an imperative part of our fight for a just transition to renewable energy. No community should be labeled as a sacrifice zone.

Since 2017, Climate Reality has coordinated a campaign in the Ohio River Valley region opposing petrochemicals and fossil fuel development. We're in the process of expanding our reach to support communities across the globe who are fighting back against fossil fuels. **To learn how you can get involved, sign up for our [Petrochemical Page on Reality Hub](#) where we will post actions that you can take and keep you up to date on the best ways to oppose false climate solutions.**

References

- EPA Staff. (2022, August 18). Participate in the Permitting Process. EPA. Retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://www.epa.gov/title-v-operating-permits/participate-permitting-process>
- EPA Staff. (2022, September 15). Environmental Impact Statement Filing Guidance. EPA. Retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://www.epa.gov/nepa/environmental-impact-statement-filing-guidance>
- Goldtooth, D., Saldamando, A., & Gracey, K. (2021, November 3). Indigenous Resistance Against Carbon Report. Indigenous Environmental Network | [ienearth.org](https://www.ienearth.org). Retrieved September 21, 2022, from <https://www.ienearth.org/irac-counting-up-the-impact/>
- Reports, S. (2021, July 29). The Recycling Myth: A plastic waste solution littered with failure. Reuters. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/environment-plastic-oil-recycling/>
- Rosenberg, L. (2021, July 14). What to know about the now-canceled Byhalia Connection Pipeline. Green Matters. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from <https://www.greenmatters.com/p/byhalia-connection-pipeline>