

Big Oil is Still Lying

Five Ways the Fossil Fuel
Industry Deceives the
Public and Policymakers
About its Ongoing
Climate Destruction

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The Center for Climate Integrity empowers communities and elected officials with the knowledge and tools they need to hold oil and gas corporations accountable for the massive costs of climate change.

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Introduction

From Denial to Duplicity

After raking in record-breaking profits in 2022, some of the world’s biggest oil and gas companies, including ExxonMobil, Shell, and BP, declared that they would scale back previously touted plans to reduce their climate pollution and to invest more in lower-carbon projects.¹ Then, one by one, oil giants announced new plans that would expand their fossil fuel businesses and increase their climate pollution even more: Exxon and Chevron both moved to acquire oil producing competitors and expand production capacity in stock deals valued at more than \$50 billion,² and Shell and BP announced plans to increase fossil fuel output in the upcoming years.³

In spite of clear evidence that fossil fuel production must rapidly decline to avoid catastrophic global warming, when combined, Big Oil companies plan on exceeding globally-agreed upon fossil fuel production levels by 110% by 2030.⁴

While Big Oil doubles down on the products driving the world toward climate catastrophe, the companies simultaneously run advertisements that promote and greenwash their brands as leaders in advancing so-called solutions to climate change. “If your business is looking for ways to reduce carbon emissions, we’re working on solutions that could help,” declared an Exxon social media ad campaign that promised to “help other industries deliver low emissions.”⁵

1 Ben Elgin and Kevin Crowley, “Exxon Walking Away from Algae Biofuel Projects in Climate Retreat,” [Bloomberg.com](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-10/exxon-retreats-from-major-climate-ef-fort-to-make-biofuels-from-algae), February 10, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-10/exxon-retreats-from-major-climate-ef-fort-to-make-biofuels-from-algae>; Will Mathis, “Shell to Pause Renewables Unit’s Spending Growth after Record 2022,” [Bloomberg.com](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-02/shell-to-pause-renewables-unit-s-spending-growth-after-record-2022), February 2, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-02-02/shell-to-pause-renewables-unit-s-spending-growth-after-record-2022>; Evan Halper and Aaron Gregg, “BP Dials Back Climate Pledge amid Soaring Oil Profits,” [The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/02/07/bp-climate-emissions-oil-profits/), February 7, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/02/07/bp-climate-emissions-oil-profits/>.

2 ExxonMobil, ExxonMobil announces merger with Pioneer Natural Resources in an all-stock transaction, October 11, 2023, https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/news/news-releases/2023/1011_exxonmobil-announces-merger-with-pioneer-natural-resources-in-an-all-stock-transaction; Chevron, “Chevron Announces Agreement to Acquire Hess,” [chevron.com](https://www.chevron.com/newsroom/2023/q4/chevron-announces-agreement-to-acquire-hess), October 23, 2023, <https://www.chevron.com/newsroom/2023/q4/chevron-announces-agreement-to-acquire-hess>.

3 Jeff Brady, “Shell Plans to Increase Fossil Fuel Production despite Its Net-Zero Pledge,” [NPR](https://www.npr.org/2023/06/14/1182102392/shell-plans-to-increase-fossil-fuel-production-despite-its-net-zero-pledge), June 14, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/14/1182102392/shell-plans-to-increase-fossil-fuel-production-despite-its-net-zero-pledge>; Stanley Reed, “BP to Increase Oil Output, New Chief Says,” [The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/06/business/bp-oil-gas-profits.html), February 6, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/06/business/bp-oil-gas-profits.html>.

4 Stockholm Environment Institute, “Phasing down or Phasing Up?,” productiongap.org, November 2023, https://productiongap.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PGR2023_web_rev.pdf.

5 ExxonMobil, “We’re Developing Emission Reducing Technologies That Work in Our Operations and Deploying Them with Other Industries, Too.,” [Twitter](https://twitter.com/exxonmobil/status/1708841065443217727), October 2, 2023, <https://twitter.com/exxonmobil/status/1708841065443217727>.

“ This toxic cover-up could push our world over the climate cliff. The sham must end. ”

U.N. Secretary General António Guterres⁶

A Shell advertisement in the Washington Post promoted the company’s use of natural gas as a “lower-carbon fuel” that could “help decrease” carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions,⁷ and BP highlighted its repairs at a wind turbine farm as evidence for how the company is “building the energy system of the future.”⁸

A deeper look at the oil and gas industry’s public statements, advertisements, and investments shows that Big Oil companies are embracing a new era of climate deception: one focused more on duplicity than denial. After spending decades lying to the public and policymakers about the central role of their fossil fuel products in causing the climate crisis, major oil and gas corporations now routinely deceive audiences about their commitment to climate solutions in an effort to protect their profits and social license to continue business as usual. This new approach to climate deception by Big Oil companies, their front groups, and their allies is often more subtle and harder to identify than the industry’s previous efforts to spread outright climate denial.

These deceptive statements, advertisements, and campaigns flare up during key moments when policymakers propose or advance climate legislation. Many of the examples cited in this report take place in the lead up to the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

This report is intended to serve as a guide for the public, policymakers, media members, and others to help recognize and counter five leading tactics that fossil fuel interests now use to evade accountability for continuing to drive the climate crisis.

6 U.N. Secretary General, “Bogus Net-Zero Pledges ‘Rank Deception’, Sham Must End, Secretary-General Stresses at Launch of Report by High-Level Expert Group on Non-State Actors’ Commitments | UN Press,” United Nations, November 8, 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sgsm21576.doc.htm>.

7 WP Brand Studio, “The Making of Sustainable Mobility,” The Washington Post, accessed February 26, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/brand-studio/shell/the-making-of-sustainable-mobility>.

8 BP, “BP Boosts Renewable Energy Production and Efficiency at US Wind Farm,” November 20, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFeyqWeV1qw>.

Lie #1

Investing in Clean Energy

Claim

Oil companies are critical players — if not leaders — in the transition to renewable energy.

Reality

Oil companies are playing a **negligible role** in the global energy transition, and their minuscule investments in cleaner energy are **dwarfed by their fossil fuel expenditures.**

When it comes to deceiving the public about clean energy efforts, fossil fuel corporations rely on half truths and the promotion of far-off goals as opposed to measurable results in order to present a public image as clean energy leaders.

In reality, oil and gas companies make-up just 1% of all global investments in clean energy, according to a 2023 International Energy Agency (IEA) analysis.⁹ In 2022, these companies invested around 2.5% of their capital expenditures in clean energy — a far cry from the 50% the IEA projects is needed by the end of the decade to align with Paris Agreement goals.¹⁰ But that hasn't stopped oil companies from making misleading claims that overstate their contributions.

In 2021, Shell told investors that \$2.4 billion out of its total \$19.7 billion capital expenditure — about 12% — was dedicated to “renewables and energy solutions.”¹¹ In reality, an analysis of the oil giant’s expenditures by Global Witness revealed that most of Shell’s claimed renewable investments were actually in gas projects — projects that lock in decades

9 International Energy Agency, “The oil and gas industry in net zero transitions,” December 2023, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/41800202-d427-44fa-8544-12e3d6e023b4/TheOilandGasIndustryinNetZeroTransitions.pdf>.

10 International Energy Agency, “The oil and gas industry in net zero transitions.”

11 “Shell Faces Groundbreaking Complaint for Misleading US Authorities and Investors on Its Energy Transition Efforts,” Global Witness, February 1, 2023, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/fossil-gas/shell-faces-groundbreaking-complaint-misleading-us-authorities-and-investors-its-energy-transition-efforts/>.

12 Gretchen Watkins, Shell, October 28, 2021, https://www.shell.us/media/shell-speaks-in-front-of-congress/_jcr_content/par/textimage.stream/1635433867197/f0d609f3956ca6b3a36b3bc51d348618bbaea2b0/2021-10-28-statement-of-gretchen-watkins-president-shell-oil-company-final.pdf.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM



“Shell companies have invested billions in lower-carbon energy, including solar and wind, electric vehicle charging and infrastructure.”

Shell USA President Gretchen Watkins, in testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, October 28, 2021¹²

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of future carbon and methane emissions and are certainly not true “energy solutions.”¹³ When the company’s investments in wind and solar were tallied, Shell was investing only 1.5% of its 2021 expenditures in renewable energy. By failing to state that most of their lower-carbon investments were in gas projects, Shell deceptively suggested the company was making more investments in traditional renewable energy sources like solar and wind than they truly were — a selective half truth that serves to maintain their public image as a partner in climate solutions.

In 2023, Shell decided to not increase its spending on renewable energy projects,¹⁴ a move that prompted Shell employees to write an open letter to CEO Wael Sawan about their “deep concern” about the company’s move away from renewable energy.¹⁵

Loudly overstating the extent of their clean energy investments and then quietly retracting them is a pattern throughout the oil and gas industry.

In 2019, BP ran a series of television, print, and digital ads titled “Possibilities Everywhere” that touted the company’s wind and solar investments. The public interest law firm ClientEarth filed a complaint against BP with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the United Kingdom, alleging the ads misled the public because of their focus on low-carbon projects when, in reality, 96% of the company’s annual expenditure is on fossil fuels — a claim that the OECD’s UK national contact point found to have merit.¹⁶ BP withdrew its ad campaign after the complaint was filed.

After acquiring Renewable Energy Group (REG) in 2022, Chevron called itself a “leading US renewable fuel company” and said the company would grow production capacity of renewable fuels.¹⁷ But in an interview with the Houston Chronicle editorial board, Chevron CEO Mike Wirth admitted that Chevron was not a leader in renewables like wind and solar, in part because of undesirable profit margins.

13 “Shell Faces Groundbreaking Complaint for Misleading US Authorities and Investors on Its Energy Transition Efforts,” Global Witness.

14 Mathis, “Shell to Pause Renewables Unit’s Spending Growth after Record 2022.”

15 Euronews Green, “Shell Employees Express ‘deep Concern’ over Renewables Regression,” euronews, September 28, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/09/28/deep-concern-shell-employees-urge-ceo-to-rethink-shift-from-renewables-in-rare-letter>.

16 ClientEarth Communications, “BP Greenwashing Complaint Sets Precedent for Action on Misleading Ad Campaigns,” ClientEarth, June 17, 2020, <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/news/bp-greenwashing-complaint-sets-precedent-for-action-on-misleading-ad-campaigns/>.

17 Chevron, “Chevron Is a Top US Renewable Fuel Company,” chevron.com, June 13, 2022, <https://www.chevron.com/newsroom/2022/q2/with-reg-acquisition-chevron-becomes-leading-us-renewable-fuel-company>.

“There’s really good wind and solar companies out there. And we don’t have particular expertise in wind and solar and a lot of the intellectual property in the turbines or in the panels,” he said in the 2023 interview. **“Our business generates typically double-digit kinds of returns on invested capital; wind and solar tend to be single-digit returns. And so in a competitive business world, you also have to look at that.”**¹⁸

Chevron plans to increase its total oil production by 11% from 2019 to 2030, according to an analysis of data from energy consultant Rystad Energy.¹⁹

Overemphasizing clean energy investments is a key part of the oil industry’s advertising strategy.

According to an analysis by InfluenceMap, five “supercompanies” — BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and TotalEnergies — invested hundreds of millions in advertising in 2021. Of the more than 3,000 advertising materials analyzed, 60% included at least one green energy claim.²⁰ In reality, major oil and gas companies have never spent more than 1% of their collective annual budgets on low-carbon projects from 2008 to 2022, according to an International Energy Agency analysis.²¹

Despite their claims, oil companies are continuing to invest in oil and gas as the window to transition away from fossil fuels and avert further catastrophe becomes more narrow. When Big Oil companies claim to be partners in the clean energy transition, it’s important to investigate whether the company is promoting future claims or present actions — and whether those present actions are actually beneficial to the climate.

18 Houston Chronicle Editorial Board, “Chevron’s Future Isn’t Wind and Solar. CEO Explains Why.,” Houston Chronicle, March 9, 2023, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/chevron-ceo-wirth-wind-solar-ceraweek-17827049.php>.

19 Oil Change International, “Big Oil Reality Check,” Oil Change International, September 2020, <http://priceofoil.org/content/uploads/2020/09/OCl-Big-Oil-Reality-Check-vE.pdf>.

20 InfluenceMap, “Big Oil’s Real Agenda on Climate Change 2022,” InfluenceMap, September 2022, <https://influencemap.org/report/Big-Oil-s-Agenda-on-Climate-Change-2022-19585>.

21 International Energy Agency, “Distribution of Cash Spending by the Oil and Gas Industry, 2008-2022 – Charts – Data & Statistics,” IEA, May 22, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/distribution-of-cash-spending-by-the-oil-and-gas-industry-2008-2022>.

22 Chevron, “Chevron Is a Top US Renewable Fuel Company.”

DECEPTIVE CLAIM

“Chevron becomes a leading US renewable fuel company.”

Chevron press release announcing renewable energy company acquisition, June 13, 2022²²

Lie #2

Decreasing Emissions

Claim

Big Oil is working to decrease climate pollution in order to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and their own net zero emissions pledges.

Reality

Oil giants are **increasing their emissions and expanding fossil fuel investments** in direct conflict with the Paris Agreement.

When their leaders do acknowledge the need to reduce fossil fuel emissions to avoid worsening climate change, oil companies rely on overpromising, underdelivering, and carefully crafting statements that allude to business plans, all while avoiding making binding commitments.

In order for the world to meet its goal of net zero emissions by 2050, the International Energy Agency concluded in 2021 that all new oil and gas infrastructure development must stop immediately.²³ A 2023 United Nations report found that, despite that dire warning, global fossil fuel production planned for 2030 is twice the acceptable limit to meet the climate goals outlined in the Paris Agreement.²⁴

In 2021, the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform opened an investigation into “the reported role of the fossil fuel industry in a long-running, industry-wide campaign to spread disinformation about the role of fossil fuels in causing global warming.”²⁵ The committee’s work uncovered never-before-seen internal records that confirmed the **“industry’s inadequate climate pledges and commitment to emissions reductions are intended to provide cover for Big Oil to continue raking in billions of dollars by selling fossil fuels for decades to come.”**²⁶

23 Fiona Harvey, “No New Oil, Gas or Coal Development If World Is to Reach Net Zero by 2050, Says World Energy Body,” The Guardian, May 18, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/18/no-new-investment-in-fossil-fuels-demands-top-energy-economist>.

24 Susanna Twidale, “Global Fossil Fuel Production Plans Far Exceed Climate Targets, ...,” Reuters, November 8, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/global-fossil-fuel-production-plans-far-exceed-climate-targets-un-says-2023-11-08/>.

25 “Oversight Committee Launches Investigation of Fossil Fuel Industry Disinformation on Climate Crisis,” House Committee on Oversight and Reform, September 16, 2021, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/oversight-committee-launches-investigation-of-fossil-fuel-industry>.

26 “Oversight Committee Releases New Documents Showing Big Oil’s Greenwashing Campaign and Failure to Reduce Emissions,” House Committee on Oversight and Reform, December 9, 2022, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/oversight-committee-releases-new-documents-showing-big-oil-s-greenwashing>.

For example, a 2019 Exxon planning document, revealed by the House Oversight investigation, showed edits to public statements pertaining to the oil giant’s membership with the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative, including a “need to remove references to Paris Agreement” because “[c]reating a tie between our advocacy/engagements and the Paris Agreement could create a potential commitment to advocate on the Paris Agreement goals.”²⁷ In other words, while Exxon CEO Darren Woods told committee members that his company “publicly supported” the Paris Agreement,²⁸ Exxon made efforts behind-the-scenes to avoid actually committing to advocate for its goals.

Despite claiming to have “publicly supported the Paris Agreement since its inception” in 2015, Exxon has not proposed or supported emissions reduction policies necessary to achieve the goals of the international agreement.

The company has also failed to develop quantitative corporate goals or take action to reduce emissions from its products — known as Scope 3 emissions, which make up 83% of the company’s total emissions — in line with the Paris Agreement.²⁹ In fact, Exxon is suing people who suggest that they should set Scope 3 emissions reduction goals; in January 2024, Exxon sued its own shareholders over a climate proposal that would require the company to set target reduction goals for Scope 3 emissions.³⁰ Exxon announced that it would continue its lawsuit against shareholders even

27 Fossil Fuel Documents For Release, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230923190650/https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/2022/Fossil-FuelDocumentsForRelease.pdf>, 36.

28 Committee on Oversight and Reform, “Fueling the climate crisis: Exposing big oil’s disinformation ...”, October 28, 2021, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/G000/20211028/114185/HHRG-117-G000-Transcript-20211028.pdf>, 9.

29 Pete Trelenberg, “Reaffirming Our Commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement,” Exxon-Mobil, January 20, 2021, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/news/viewpoints/commitment-paris-agreement>; Climate Action 100+, “Company Assessment: Exxon Mobil Corp.,” Climate Action 100+, December 8, 2023, <https://www.climateaction100.org/company/exxon-mobil-corporation/#skeletonsPanel1>; World Benchmarking Alliance, “Oil and Gas Benchmark - ExxonMobil,” World Benchmarking Alliance, November 11, 2022, <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/publication/oil-and-gas/companies/exxon-mobil-2/>.

30 Sabrina Valle and Nate Raymond, “Exxon Files Lawsuit against Investors’ Climate Proposal | Reuters,” Reuters, January 22, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/exxon-files-law-suit-against-investors-climate-proposal-2024-01-21/>.

31 Committee on Oversight and Reform, “Fueling the climate crisis: Exposing big oil’s disinformation ...”, 9.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM



“ We ... have publicly supported the Paris Agreement since its inception.”

ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods, in testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, October 28, 2021³¹

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after they withdrew the proposal.³² In 2023, Exxon bought major shale company Pioneer Natural Resources — a \$60 billion merger that will more than double Exxon’s oil production in the Permian Basin to more than 1.3 million barrels per day.³³ Newly released spending plans reveal that the oil giant will continue to increase its fossil fuel project spending and expand its oil production at least through 2027.³⁴

In 2020, BP announced its intention to become a net zero company by 2050 or sooner,³⁵ and decrease fossil fuel production by 40% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels.³⁶ Just three years later, the company announced a reversal: it would invest in more oil and gas and scale back its plans to reduce oil production to just 25% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels.³⁷ Now — four years after BP’s original net zero commitment — BP is farther away from reducing its oil production than ever before. In early February 2024, new BP CEO Murray Auchincloss announced that the company would yet again increase its oil production in 2024.³⁸

BP’s regressive emissions reduction goals are revealed as increasingly deceptive by the company’s reliance on dubious solutions to achieve them. Leaked branding materials from January 2020 showed that even as BP was trumpeting its commitments to renewables, the company was still growing its oil and gas business and relying on offsets and so-called “lower carbon natural gas” to meet its emissions

32 Attracta Mooney, “Exxon Accused of ‘Bullying’ Tactics in Legal Pursuit of Climate Activist Investors,” Financial Times, February 13, 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/b1be3561-aa1e-4f0b-a564-3bd3e6ea92a3>.

33 ExxonMobil, “ExxonMobil announces merger with Pioneer Natural Resources in an all-stock transaction.”

34 Sabrina Valle, “Exxon Mobil Forecasts Increases in Project Spending, Oil Output ...,” Reuters, December 6, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/exxon-mobil-forecasts-higher-production-2024-2023-12-06/>.

35 BP, “BP Sets Ambition for Net Zero by 2050, Fundamentally Changing Organisation to Deliver,” bp global, February 12, 2020, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/bernard-looney-announces-new-ambition-for-bp.html>.

36 BP, “From International Oil Company to Integrated Energy Company: BP Sets out Strategy for Decade of Delivery towards Net Zero Ambition: News and Insights: Home,” bp global, August 4, 2020, <https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/press-releases/from-international-oil-company-to-integrated-energy-company-bp-sets-out-strategy-for-decade-of-delivery-towards-net-zero-ambition.html>.

37 Stanley Reed, “BP, in a Reversal, Says It Will Produce More Oil and Gas,” The New York Times, February 7, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/07/business/bp-oil-gas-profits.html>.

38 Reed, “BP to Increase Oil Output, New Chief Says.”

39 Committee on Oversight and Reform, “Fueling the climate crisis: Exposing big oil’s disinformation ...”, 11.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM



“As we work to make BP a net zero company, we are trying to help the world get there, too. We’ve redoubled our advocacy and support of policies to address climate change.”

BP America President David Lawler in testimony to the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform, October 28, 2021³⁹

reduction goals.⁴⁰ Recent reports found that 78% of the top 50 major carbon offset projects are “junk” because of fundamental failures that undermine the projects’ ability to actually reduce emissions.⁴¹ In January 2024, the European Parliament banned the use of “climate neutral” claims for products that exclusively utilize emissions offsetting schemes as evidence for the claim.⁴²

This pattern of highly-publicized climate goals and ambitions followed by no meaningful action can be seen throughout the industry. Chevron claims to support the Paris Agreement, but the company has failed to meet any of its climate goals or benchmark indicators, according to an analysis by Climate Action 100+.⁴³

MISLEADING AD

While BP advertises its goal to reach net zero by 2050 or sooner, the company is further away from reducing its oil production than ever before. (BP, 2021)



40 Amy Westervelt, “Leaked BP Docs Show: Protest Works. That’s Why It’s Important to Protect It,” Drilled Media, June 4, 2020, <https://drilled.media/news/bp-leak>.

41 Nina Lakhani, “Revealed: Top Carbon Offset Projects May Not Cut Planet-Heating Emissions,” The Guardian, September 19, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/19/do-carbon-credit-reduce-emissions-green-house-gases>.

42 Patrick Greenfield, “EU Bans ‘misleading’ Environmental Claims That Rely on Offsetting,” The Guardian, January 17, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/jan/17/eu-bans-misleading-environmental-claims-that-rely-on-offsetting>.

43 Climate Action 100+, “Company Assessment - Chevron Corp.,” Climate Action 100+, 2023, <https://www.climateaction100.org/company/chevron-corporation/>.

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On the contrary, Chevron's oil production is expected to increase by 11% from 2019 to 2030.⁴⁴ Additionally, the oil giant's recent \$53 billion acquisition of U.S. competitor Hess will increase the oil major's oil production by 10% on top of the 3 million barrels per day it already produces.⁴⁵

Shell released its first net zero "emissions scenario" in 2016, which contained a disclaimer in a footnote stating the company had "no immediate plans to move to a net-zero emissions portfolio over our investment horizon of 10–20 years."⁴⁶ In an internal email obtained by the U.S. House Oversight Committee, an employee admitted that Shell's "net zero" scenario had "nothing to do with our business plans."⁴⁷ In a 2021 press release from Shell announcing a claimed acceleration of its net zero target included a disclaimer that "Shell's operating plans and budgets do not reflect Shell's Net-Zero Emissions target."⁴⁸ That sentiment became clearer in March 2024 when Shell abandoned its plan to lower its carbon emissions by 45% by 2035 and scaled back its 2030 emissions reduction goal, citing uncertainty and oil demand.⁴⁹

Before giving credit to oil companies for claiming to prioritize lowering emissions, it's key to question whether a company's actions — especially their oil and gas investments and expansions — align with the public comments they are making.

44 Oil Change International, "Big Oil Reality Check."

45 Clifford Krauss and Stanley Reed, "Chevron to Acquire Hess for \$53 Billion in Latest Major Oil Deal," The New York Times, October 23, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/23/business/chevron-hess-acquisition.html>.

46 Shell, "A Better Life with a Healthy Planet," Shell Global, May 2016, https://www.shell.com/news-and-insights/scenarios/what-are-the-previous-shell-scenarios/_jcr_content/root/main/section_745060082/promo/links/item0.stream/1655563112084/f53f377c-72c622102c589336d7eb60bfc1cf0c6b/scenarios-nze-brochure-interactive-afwv9-interactive.pdf.

47 Committee on Oversight and Accountability, "Ahead of Hearing, Committee Releases Memo Showing Fossil Fuel Industry Is Misleading the Public about Commitment to Reduce Emissions," House Committee on Oversight and Reform, December 21, 2022, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/ahead-of-hearing-committee-releases-memo-showing-fossil-fuel-industry-is>.

48 Shell, "Shell Accelerates Drive for Net-Zero Emissions with Customer-First Strategy," Shell Global, February 11, 2021, <https://www.shell.com/news-and-insights/newsroom/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-accelerates-drive-for-net-zero-emissions-with-customer-first-strategy.html>.

49 Ron Bousso, "Shell Weakens 2030 Carbon Emissions Reduction Target | Reuters," Reuters, March 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/shell-loosens-2030-carbon-emissions-target-2024-03-14/>.

50 CNBC Television, "Chevron CEO Mike Wirth Discusses Clean Energy Transition at Aspen Ideas Festival - 6/26/2023," YouTube, June 26, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7z1Ozxlvqc>.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM



“We’re working to reduce our emissions.”

Chevron CEO Mike Wirth, in an interview at the Aspen Ideas Festival, June 26, 2023⁵⁰

Lie #3

Leading Climate “Solutions”

Claim

Oil companies are leading the development of real solutions to the climate crisis, like “lower-carbon” natural gas, biofuels, and carbon capture and storage.

Reality

The oil and gas industry promotes **false solutions** that prolong the use of fossil fuels and distract the public from the urgent need to transition to clean energy.

Eager to be perceived as part of the solution rather than enablers of the climate crisis, oil majors have propped up several false climate solutions throughout the years, including natural gas, biofuels, and carbon capture and storage (CCS).

False Solution: Natural Gas

One go-to industry favorite is “natural gas,” which fossil fuel companies have long positioned as a “cleaner-burning” and “lower-emission” fuel.⁵¹ Big Oil companies claim that a “low- and no-carbon future starts with natural gas,”⁵² and argue that natural gas can “prevent climate change from advancing” as an “economical, environmentally friendly complement to renewable energy.”⁵³ ExxonMobil ran an ad campaign uplifting natural gas — also known as methane gas — as a lower-carbon gas option and a “perfect pair” for renewable energy, comparing the combination to peanut butter and jelly.⁵⁴ In 2024, a BP advertising campaign emphasized its oil, gas, and renewable energy investments using the slogan “it’s *and*, not *or*.”⁵⁵

51 ExxonMobil, “Innovating Energy Solutions Research and Development Highlights,” ExxonMobil Corporate, July 15, 2019, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/-/media/Global/Files/research-and-development-highlights/Innovating-Energy-Solutions-R-and-D-brochure.PDF>.

52 WP BrandStudio, “Low- and No-Carbon Future Starts with Natural Gas,” The Washington Post, February 15, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/brand-studio/wp/2019/02/15/low-and-no-carbon-future-starts-with-natural-gas/>.

53 Shell and T Brand, “Moving Forward: A Path to Net Zero Emissions by 2070,” The New York Times, January 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/paidpost/shell/ul/moving-forward-a-path-to-net-zero-emissions-by-2070.html>; WP BrandStudio, “Low- and No-Carbon Future Starts with Natural Gas.”

54 ExxonMobil, “Peanut Butter & Jelly | Exxonmobil,” YouTube, January 14, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUlxBL82Q08>.

55 Bp American (@bp_America), “We are one of America’s largest energy investors. With investments like scaling up US biogas and starting up new oil & gas infrastructure. It’s and, not or.” Twitter, January 19, 2024, 11:00, https://twitter.com/bp_America/status/1748420110488912154.

In reality, when methane leaks are included in the analysis, natural gas emissions can be “as bad as coal.”⁵⁶

While the industry promotes natural gas as an off-ramp toward renewable energy, researchers have found no apparent plans from oil companies or countries to actually transition off gas. **Without a transition plan, the promotion of natural gas becomes a tool to prolong and further entrench fossil fuel use.** According to the 2023 Production Gap report, “gas could hinder or delay the transition to renewable energy systems by locking in fossil-fuel-based systems and institutions.”⁵⁷

Despite the threat that natural gas poses to the climate, gas companies continue to invest in the fossil fuel product, promoting it as a “low-carbon” energy source and leaving consumers to conflate “low-carbon” with “climate friendly.”

A 2018 Shell advertisement in the Washington Post, for example, called liquified natural gas a “lower-carbon fuel” that could “help decrease” CO2 emissions.⁵⁸

False Solution: Algae

As the public became more aware of the dangers of fossil fuels in the early 2000s, the oil industry began promoting investments in biofuels. Exxon spent more than \$60 million over a decade advertising its plan to produce 10,000 barrels of algae biofuel per day by 2025,⁵⁹ while privately acknowledging the technology was “still decades away,” according to an internal presentation from 2018.⁶⁰

56 Hiroko Tabuchi, “Leaks Can Make Natural Gas as Bad for the Climate as Coal, a Study Says,” The New York Times, July 13, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/13/climate/natural-gas-leaks-coal-climate-change.html>.

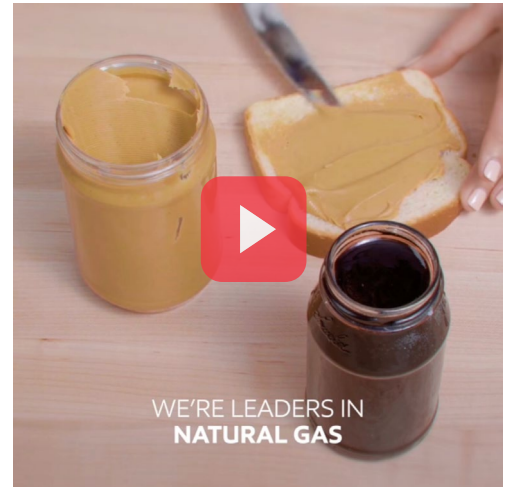
57 Production Gap, “Production Gap Report 2023,” [productiongap.org](https://productiongap.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PGR2023_web_rev.pdf), November 2023, https://productiongap.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PGR2023_web_rev.pdf.

58 WP BrandStudio, “The Making of Sustainable Mobility,” Washington Post, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/brand-studio/shell/the-making-of-sustainable-mobility>.

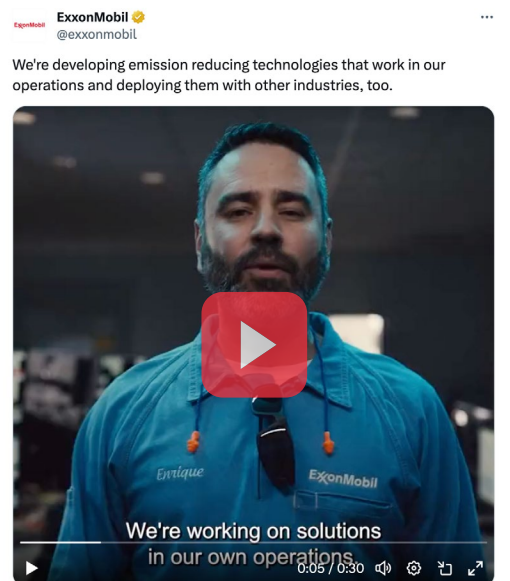
59 Nick Cunningham, “Internal Documents Show Big Oil PR Messages Still ‘mislead’ Public on Climate,” DeSmog, September 16, 2022, <https://www.desmog.com/2022/09/16/shell-exxon-oil-pr-mismatch-carbon-capture-algae/>; ExxonMobil, “ExxonMobil and Synthetic Genomics Algae Biofuels Program Targets 10,000 Barrels per Day by 2025,” ExxonMobil, March 6, 2018, https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/news/news-releases/2018/0306_exxonmobil-and-synthetic-genomics-algae-biofuels-program-targets-10000-barrels-per-day-by-2025.

60 Exxon Knews (@Exxon_Knew), “For years, Exxon has touted its biofuels operation as a solution to climate change. But in 2018, an Exxon presentation stated that algae technology is ‘still decades away from the scale we need.’” Twitter, September 14, 2022, 17:05, https://twitter.com/Exxon_Knew/status/1570202060884254721.

MISLEADING ADS



Natural gas is not a climate solution, despite Exxon’s advertisements. (ExxonMobil, 2020)



Exxon’s “emission reducing technologies” are in reality a tool to prolong fossil fuel use. (ExxonMobil, 2023)

Despite using algae biofuel as a prop for a green image, Exxon quietly abandoned the highly-advertised project and cut funding ties with several major algae research projects in 2023.⁶¹

False Solution: Carbon Capture and Storage

More recently, oil and gas companies have been touting the importance of carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a means to reduce climate pollution.⁶² CCS describes a complex set of technologies and infrastructure that capture carbon dioxide, transport it — often great distances — and inject it deep into geologic structures that, in theory, would hold the CO₂ underground forever.⁶³

CCS suffers from many shortcomings — for one, it’s exorbitantly expensive,⁶⁴ the majority of the existing facilities have drastically underperformed,⁶⁵ and it’s decades away from being able to deliver at a scale that puts any meaningful dent in emissions. For another, the technology fundamentally promotes a continued reliance on fossil fuels as opposed to investments in clean energy. A 2021 Princeton University report, which theorizes what it would take for the U.S. to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, calls for a nationwide buildout of over 65,000 miles of new carbon dioxide pipelines — an estimated cost of \$170 billion to \$230 billion.⁶⁶ For that massive investment, the infrastructure would capture just 15% of current annual U.S. emissions, according to a JP Morgan analysis of the report.⁶⁷

61 Elgin and Crowley, “Exxon Walking Away from Algae Biofuel Projects in Climate Retreat.”

62 ExxonMobil, “Carbon Capture and Storage,” ExxonMobil, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/what-we-do/delivering-industrial-solutions/carbon-capture-and-storage>; Shell, “Carbon Capture and Storage,” Shell Global, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.shell.com/what-we-do/carbon-capture-and-storage.html#vanity-aHR0cHM-6Ly93d3cuc2h1bGwuy29tL2VuZXJneS1hbmQtaW5ub3ZhdGlvbi9iYXJib24tY2FwdHVyZS1hb-mQtc3RvcnFnZS5odG1s=&iframe=L3dlYmFwcmV0Q0NTX0dsb2JlLw>.

63 IEA, “Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage - Energy System,” IEA, July 11, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/energy-system/carbon-capture-utilisation-and-storage>.

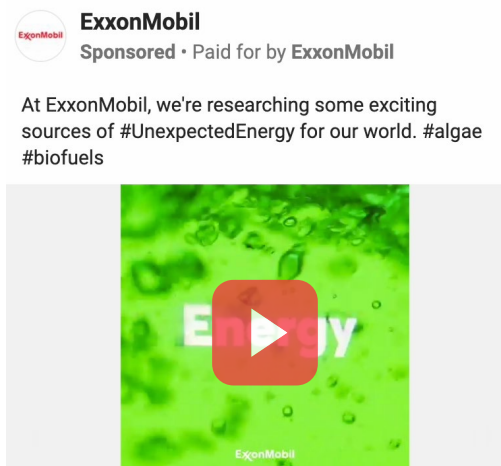
64 Nicholas Cunningham, “Widespread CCS Use Would Cost Trillions of Dollars: Study,” Gas Outlook, December 5, 2023, <https://gasoutlook.com/news/widespread-ccs-use-would-cost-trillions-of-dollars-study/>.

65 Adam Vaughan, “Most Major Carbon Capture and Storage Projects Haven’t Met Targets,” New Scientist, September 1, 2022, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2336018-most-major-carbon-capture-and-storage-projects-havent-met-targets/>.

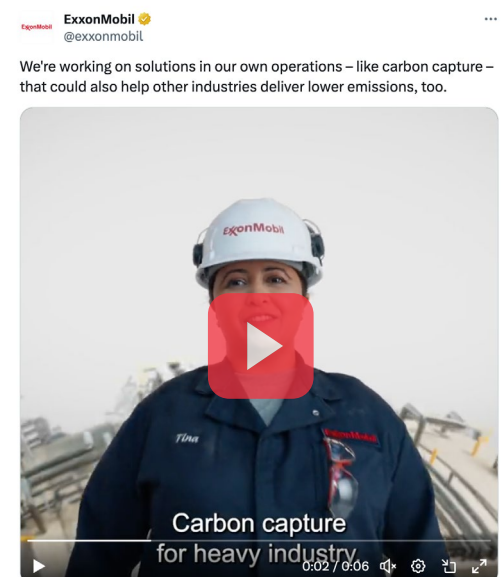
66 Eric Larson et al., “Net-Zero America Project,” Princeton University, October 29, 2021, <https://netzeroamerica.princeton.edu/the-report>, 205.

67 Michael Cembalest, “2021 Annual Energy Paper,” JP MORGAN ASSET AND WEALTH MANAGEMENT, May 2021, <https://am.jpmorgan.com/content/dam/jpm-am-aem/global/en/insights/eye-on-the-market/future-shock-amv.pdf>, 22.

MISLEADING ADS



One of many Exxon advertisements for its now abandoned algae project. (ExxonMobil, 2018)



Exxon advertises carbon capture as a solution, but the majority of existing operations are used to obtain more oil. (ExxonMobil, 2023)

Big Oil is Still Lying

In addition, these CO2 pipelines would create new hazards and environmental justice threats to vulnerable communities across the country.⁶⁸

Even as oil and gas companies claim CCS will address the emissions crisis, they are using the technology to expand their oil production.

As of 2021, 80% of existing CCS operations have been applied almost exclusively to obtain more oil, by using CO2 captured from oil refining and other industry operations for so-called “enhanced oil recovery” — the process of injecting captured CO2 into an oil field to force out crude oil that would otherwise be unrecoverable.⁶⁹ In other words, oil companies are right now using this so-called climate solution to expand oil production, prolonging the transition from fossil fuels and doing little to address our immediate need to reduce and end carbon pollution.⁷⁰

Despite CCS’s ineffectiveness as an at-scale climate solution, oil and gas companies continue to use their investments in the technology as evidence that they are a partner in the clean energy transition.

In 2021, Exxon announced it would invest more than \$15 billion on “lower greenhouse gas emission initiatives,” much of which would go toward CCS.⁷¹ Shell has also sought out CCS as a solution to its vast emissions, investing \$146 million in the technology in 2021.⁷² BP and Chevron are also investing in the technology rather than limiting the creation of new carbon emissions.⁷³ A recent analysis by InfluenceMap found that more than 80% of CCS policies that oil and gas companies advocated for from 2021 to 2023 do not align with the climate science accepted by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.⁷⁴ Notably, all of the industry’s CCS proposals focus on production

68 Dan Zegart, “Gassing Satartia: How a CO2 Pipeline Explosion Affected This Mississippi Town,” HuffPost, September 17, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/gassing-satartia-mississippi-co2-pipeline_n_60ddea9fe4b0ddef8b0ddc8f.

69 CIEL, “Confronting the Myth of Carbon-Free Fossil Fuels - CIEL,” Center for International Environmental Law, 2021, <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Confronting-the-Myth-of-Carbon-Free-Fossil-Fuels.pdf>.

70 CIEL, “Confronting the Myth of Carbon-Free Fossil Fuels - CIEL.”

71 Darren Woods, “Why We’re Investing \$15 Billion in a Lower-Carbon Future,” ExxonMobil, November 9, 2021, https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/news/news-releases/2021/1109_why-we-are-investing-15-billion-in-a-lower-carbon-future.

72 Shell, “Carbon Capture and Storage,” Shell Sustainability Report 2021, 2021, <https://reports.shell.com/sustainability-report/2021/achieving-net-zero-emissions/managing-greenhouse-gas-emissions/carbon-capture-and-storage.html>.

73 BP United States, “CCS: What We Do,” bp United States, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.bp.com/en_us/unit-ed-states/home/what-we-do/gas-and-low-carbon-energy/ccs.html; Chevron, “Capturing and Storing Carbon Emissions,” [chevron.com](https://www.chevron.com/operations/capturing-and-storing-carbon-emissions), accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.chevron.com/operations/capturing-and-storing-carbon-emissions>.

74 Dana Drugmand, “Corporate Promotion of Carbon Capture and Storage Contradicts Science, Study Finds,” DeSmog, November 30, 2023, <https://www.desmog.com/2023/11/30/influencemap-report-carbon-capture-corporations-par-is-agreement/>.

and refining and would do nothing to reduce emissions associated with the use of their fuel products as intended, which account for 80% to 95% of the oil industry's greenhouse gas emissions.⁷⁵

Big Oil's continued promotion of these unviable false solutions provides cover for the industry to continue investing in fossil fuels while simultaneously claiming to be part of the energy transition. As the industry continues to face pressure to address its massive emissions problem, take note of which solutions they propose actually reduce emissions and which ones enable the continued use of fossil fuels while treating emissions reductions as an afterthought.

MISLEADING AD

BP claims it is reimagining energy, but in reality it is continuing business as usual. (BP, 2020)



⁷⁵ Wood Mackenzie, "Few Oil and Gas Companies Commit to Scope 3 Net Zero Emissions as Significant Challenges Remain," Wood Mackenzie, October 28, 2022, <https://www.woodmac.com/press-releases/few-oil-and-gas-companies-commit-to-scope-3-net-zero-emissions-as-significant-challenges-remain/>.

Lie #4

Supporting Climate Action

Claim

Big Oil companies support policies to solve the climate crisis.

Reality

Behind the scenes, **polluters work to oppose the clean energy transition** while protecting and expanding their fossil fuel investments.

Big Oil companies often delegate their dirty lobbying to front groups and other industry allies to maintain a more socially acceptable public image. When it comes to the industry's claims to support climate action — which could significantly undercut their profits — it's key to investigate who is funding the opposition that benefits the oil industry.

Many oil and gas majors publicly claim to be climate leaders while privately fighting against climate policy. An example is a carbon tax, an emissions fee that aims to incentivize a reduction in fossil fuel consumption, which many oil giants claim to support.

But according to former senior Exxon lobbyist Keith McCoy, that support is often disingenuous. In a candid on-camera confession, McCoy said that Exxon publicly supports a carbon tax only because the company does not believe one will be enacted.⁷⁶ **“I will tell you there is not an appetite for a carbon tax,” McCoy said. “It is a non-starter...But it gives us a talking point. We can say well what is ExxonMobil for? Well we're for a carbon tax.”**

McCoy also revealed that companies like Exxon have used “shadow groups” to combat climate action to mask its involvement in efforts to kill policies that would harm the polluter's interests.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Alex Thomson, “Revealed: ExxonMobil's Lobbying War on Climate Change Legislation,” Channel 4 News, June 30, 2021, <https://www.channel4.com/news/revealed-exxonmobils-lobbying-war-on-climate-change-legislation>.

⁷⁷ Thomson, “Revealed: ExxonMobil's Lobbying War on Climate Change Legislation.”

⁷⁸ Darren Woods, “Climate Policy and Energy Investments,” ExxonMobil, January 24, 2022, <https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/what-we-do/delivering-industrial-solutions/carbon-capture-and-storage/climate-policy-energy-investments>.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM



“ We respect and support society's ambition to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 and continue to advocate for policies that promote cost-effective, market-based solutions to address the risks of climate change.”

ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods on the company's website.⁷⁸

The oil industry, according to McCoy, often employs its trade associations, such as the American Petroleum Institute (API), to serve as so-called “whipping boy[s],” in McCoy’s words.

“We don’t want it to be us, to have these conversations, especially in a hearing,” McCoy said. **“It’s getting our associations to step in and have those conversations and answer those tough questions and be, for the lack of a better term, the whipping boy for some of these members of Congress.”**

This use of front groups became clearer when several Big Oil CEOs testified before the U.S. House Oversight Committee in October 2021 as part of that committee’s investigation. Shell USA President Gretchen Watkins touted the company’s support for electric vehicle charging infrastructure and a methane fee as ways to incentivize decarbonization of the transportation system.⁷⁹ But U.S. Representative Ro Khanna noted that Shell was a member of API, which spent millions of dollars on advertising and lobbying against electric vehicles and a methane fee. Khanna pointedly asked Watkins if she would tell the API president Mike Sommers — also present at the hearing — to stop advertising against the climate policies Shell claimed to support. Watkins, as well as the CEOs for Chevron, Exxon, and BP America, declined to condemn API’s negative advertising and, when explicitly asked by Khanna, would not commit to ending their company’s membership with API if the front group continued to advertise and lobby against the climate policies. The Big Oil CEOs also did not commit to conducting an independent audit to ensure their funding as members of API did not go toward climate denial.

Despite claiming their companies are committed to developing climate solutions, major oil and gas corporations and their executives are key players in leadership positions at industry trade associations that act as roadblocks to climate policy progress.

Watkins and several other major oil executives represent their companies as board members for the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce⁸⁰ — two of the most obstructive trade associations on climate policy in the nation, according to lobbying records and advertising expenditures analyzed by InfluenceMap.⁸¹

79 House Oversight and Reform, “Fueling the Climate Crisis: Exposing Big Oil’s Disinformation Campaign to Prevent Climate Action,” [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event/114185/text), October 28, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/event/117th-congress/house-event/114185/text>.

80 InfluenceMap, “Reports,” InfluenceMap, September 2022, https://content.influencemap.org/site/data/001/046/Tyson_2022_NAMBoard_September2022.pdf; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “U.S. Chamber Board of Directors,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.uschamber.com/about/governance/board-of-directors>.

81 InfluenceMap, “Corporate Climate Policy Footprint,” InfluenceMap, November 2021, <https://influencemap.org/report/The-Carbon-Policy-Footprint-Report-2021-670f36863e7859e1ad7848ec601dda97>.

Big Oil is Still Lying

Shell, Exxon, Chevron, and BP are all members of API,⁸² which strongly opposes greenhouse gas emissions regulations, carbon taxes, and renewable energy standards.⁸³

A 2020 Unearthed and HuffPost investigation found that Shell and BP were still active members of at least eight trade organizations lobbying against climate measures — ties that were not disclosed in public lobbying reports.⁸⁴ Even after Exxon pledged to stop funding climate denialist organizations in 2006, a review of their public giving shows the company gave more than \$14 million to such institutions between 2008 and 2017.⁸⁵

While some industry front groups clearly intend to block climate policies and protect oil and gas investments, Big Oil also has ties to more deceptive front groups that promote disinformation surrounding renewable energy advancements.

Along the East Coast, groups with eco-friendly sounding names, such as Protect Our Coast New Jersey and Save Our Beach View, have urged local residents and officials to oppose new wind energy infrastructure, claiming that offshore wind infrastructure will lead to the “industrialization of the ocean” and kill marine life.⁸⁶ The funding of these groups has been traced back to fossil fuel-funded organizations like the Caesar Rodney Institute and the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers.⁸⁷

82 American Petroleum Institute, “Members,” Energy API, accessed February 29, 2024, <https://www.api.org/membership/members>.

83 InfluenceMap, “American Petroleum Institute (API).”

84 Zach Boren, Alexander C. Kaufman, and Lawrence Carter, “Revealed: BP and Shell Back Anti-Climate Lobby Groups despite Pledges,” HuffPost UK, September 28, 2020, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/bp-shell-climate_n_5f6e3120c5b64deddeed6762.

85 David Adam, “Exxon to Cut Funding to Climate Change Denial Groups,” The Guardian, May 28, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2008/may/28/climatechange.fossilfuels>; Union of Concerned Scientists, “ExxonMobil Worldwide Giving 1998-2017,” Union of Concerned Scientists, 2018, <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2019/ExxonMobil-Worldwide-Giving-1998-2017.pdf>.

86 Adele Peters, “These Groups Fighting Offshore Wind Say It’s about Whales—but They’re Funded by Big Oil,” Fast Company, March 1, 2023, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90856401/these-groups-fighting-offshore-wind-say-its-about-whales-but-theyre-funded-by-big-oil>.

87 Peters, “These Groups Fighting Offshore Wind Say It’s about Whales—but They’re Funded by Big Oil.”

88 BP, “Challenging Carbon: Six Ways BP Is Taking Action on Climate Change: News and Insights: Home,” bp global, April 6, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230206202246/https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/news-and-insights/reimagining-energy/sustainability-report-carbon-6-ways-bp-taking-action.html&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1713544980902370&usg=AOvVaw20fdRIJ2fgqVKRKnRKKnuE>.

DECEPTIVE CLAIM

“BP supports the concept of a carbon price, where producers and consumers pay for the greenhouse gas emissions they emit.”

BP webpage: “Challenging carbon: six ways BP is taking action on climate change.”⁸⁸

Another tactic to prevent key company executives from being caught speaking out against progressive climate policy is to outsource the protection of the status quo to a legion of lobbyists. In 2022, the oil and gas industry sent 636 lobbyists to the UN climate talks — the second largest delegation, rivaled only by representatives for the United Arab Emirates.⁸⁹ That number pales in comparison to the record-setting 2,456 fossil fuel lobbyists recorded at COP28 in Dubai in 2023.⁹⁰ According to an internal BP email uncovered by the House Oversight Committee, oil and gas companies use lobbyists to “resist and block” policies they don’t like.⁹¹

As the window to avert climate catastrophe narrows and oil companies face more public pressure to cooperate in climate action, pay attention to where they are directing their lobbying money and with whom they are partnering.

89 Ruth Michaelson, “‘Explosion’ in Number of Fossil Fuel Lobbyists at Cop27 Climate Summit,” The Guardian, November 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/10/big-rise-in-number-of-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-at-cop27-climate-summit>.

90 Nina Lakhina, “Record Number of Fossil Fuel Lobbyists Get Access to Cop28 Climate Talks,” The Guardian, December 5, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/05/record-number-of-fossil-fuel-lobbyists-get-access-to-cop28-climate-talks>.

91 Carolyn Maloney and Ro Khanna, “Memorandum - House Committee on Oversight and Reform,” Committee on Oversight and Accountability Democrats, December 9, 2022, <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/oversight-committee-releases-new-documents-showing-big-oil-s-greenwashing>.

Lie #5

Blaming Consumers

Claim

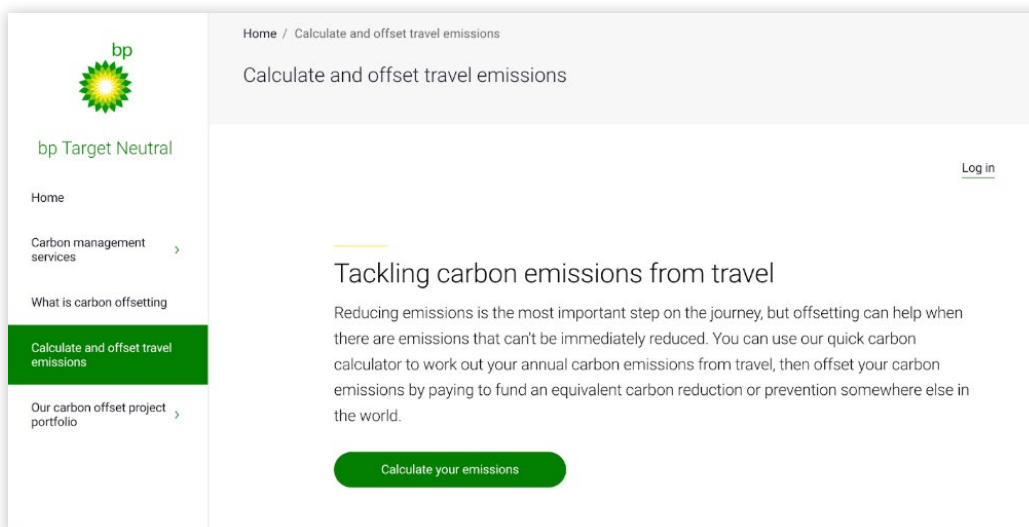
Individual consumers are personally responsible for causing — and solving — climate change.

Reality

Oil companies consistently block energy alternatives and fight regulations in order to keep global markets and consumers dependent on oil and gas.

For decades, the public has been told that our individual consumer choices play a significant role in both causing and solving the climate crisis.⁹² But, largely due to industry efforts to effectively block alternatives, most people still lack viable alternatives to fossil fuels. Regardless, the oil and gas industry has exploited and weaponized the guilt and responsibility that many people feel by focusing on our “personal carbon footprint” in order to shift climate blame and responsibility onto individual consumers and away from their out-sized culpability.

BP notoriously popularized the concept of a personal carbon footprint calculator with the help of public relations firm Ogilvy & Mather.⁹³



92 Kate Yoder, “Why Do Oil Companies Care so Much about Your Carbon Footprint?,” Grist, September 21, 2021, <https://grist.org/energy/footprint-fantasy/>.

93 Rebecca Solnit, “Big Oil Coined ‘carbon Footprints’ to Blame Us for Their Greed. Keep Them on the Hook,” The Guardian, August 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/aug/23/big-oil-coined-carbon-footprints-to-blame-us-for-their-greed-keep-them-on-the-hook>; Auden Schendler, “Worrying about Your Carbon Footprint Is Exactly What Big Oil Wants You to Do,” The New York Times, August 31, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/31/opinion/climate-change-carbon-neutral.html>.

On its website, BP encourages consumers to calculate the pollution generated by their personal activities, and then to buy carbon offsets — the vast majority of which are not effective⁹⁴ — through BP’s “Target Neutral” program.⁹⁵ It’s unclear how many of those carbon offsets — paid for by individual consumers — BP is able to claim for its own low-carbon efforts, but the goal of these efforts is clear: “to promote the slant that climate change is not the fault of an oil giant, but that of individuals.”⁹⁶

This tactic of using marketing and carefully chosen messaging to push blame onto consumers is not unique to BP.

A 2021 paper by Harvard University researchers found that “ExxonMobil advertisements worked to shift responsibility for global warming away from the fossil fuel industry and onto consumers.”⁹⁷ Internally, the company referred to climate change as a problem created by “fossil fuel combustion,” a known and intended result of producing and selling their products. Publicly, ExxonMobil emphasized the environmental crisis was fueled by consumers’ “energy demand.”

In a February 2024 interview with Fortune Magazine, Exxon CEO Darren Woods pushed the idea that the company is ready to supply lower-carbon fuels, but is still waiting for consumers to demand low-carbon fuels, which will be priced at a premium.⁹⁸ **“We have opportunities to make fuel with lower-carbon in it, but people aren’t willing to spend the money to do that, businesses aren’t willing to spend it,”** Woods said. “I can’t drive demand and I can’t make customers pay more for a product that has less carbon in it.”⁹⁹

94 Lakhani, “Revealed: Top Carbon Offset Projects May Not Cut Planet-Heating Emissions.”

95 BP, “Calculate and Offset Travel Emissions: BP Target Neutral,” Home, accessed October 18, 2023, https://www.bp.com/en_gb/target-neutral/home/calculate-and-offset-travel-emissions.html#/.

96 Mark Kaufman, “The Devious Fossil Fuel Propaganda We All Use,” Mashable, July 9, 2021, <https://mashable.com/feature/carbon-footprint-pr-campaign-sham>.

97 Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, “Rhetoric and Frame Analysis of ExxonMobil’s Climate Change Communications,” One Earth, May 21, 2021, [https://www.cell.com/one-earth/fulltext/S2590-3322\(21\)00233-5](https://www.cell.com/one-earth/fulltext/S2590-3322(21)00233-5).

98 Alan Murray and Michal Lev-Ram, “Exxon CEO Shares ‘Dirty Secret’ Keeping Us from Net Zero Goals,” YouTube, February 27, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=uk-w3jhxkm-Q>.

99 Murray and Lev-Ram, “Exxon CEO Shares ‘Dirty Secret’ Keeping Us from Net Zero Goals.”

100 Jane Thier, “Exxon Mobil CEO on the ‘Dirty Secret’ of Net Zero: ‘People Who Are Generating the Emissions Need to Be Aware ... and Pay the Price,’” Fortune, February 27, 2024, <https://fortune.com/2024/02/27/exxon-ceo-darren-woods-interview-pay-the-price-for-net-zero/>.

**DECEPTIVE
CLAIM**



“People who are generating the emissions need to be aware of [it] and pay the price. That’s ultimately how you solve the problem.”

ExxonMobil CEO Darren Woods, in a February 2024 interview¹⁰⁰

By framing the company's actions as purely in response to consumer demand, ExxonMobil presents itself as a passive participant in the climate crisis instead of a major contributor.

The majority of total historic climate pollution can be attributed to a relatively small number of fossil fuel producers.¹⁰¹ Yet, when faced with direct mandates to reduce their emissions, polluters continue to push the narrative that, without a shift in consumer behavior, their hands are tied.

In 2021, a Dutch court ruled that Shell must reduce its worldwide emissions by 45% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels.¹⁰² Shell appealed the ruling and publicly stated that it's actually consumers who bear responsibility for reducing emissions. "Shell continually works to help our customers reduce their emissions through the products we sell. But, despite being a major global energy producer, Shell alone cannot directly influence the energy choices made by its customers," the polluter writes in an FAQ about the ruling.¹⁰³

By simultaneously blaming individuals for their fossil fuel consumption while blocking the clean energy transition, Big Oil companies have manufactured a world in which they can claim to care about solving the climate crisis while they obstruct the renewable transition and blame slow progress on individuals for not reducing their personal carbon footprint.

101 CDP, "New Report Shows Just 100 Companies Are Source of over 70% of Emissions," CDP, July 10, 2017, <https://www.cdp.net/en/articles/media/new-report-shows-just-100-companies-are-source-of-over-70-of-emissions>.

102 Shell, "Shell Confirms Decision to Appeal Court Ruling in Netherlands Climate Case," Shell News and Insights, July 20, 2021, <https://www.shell.com/news-and-insights/newsroom/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-confirms-decision-to-appeal-court-ruling-in-netherlands-climate-case.html>.

103 Shell, "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Dutch District Court," News and Media Releases, March 22, 2022, https://web.archive.org/web/20230822121950/https://www.shell.com/media/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-confirms-decision-to-appeal-court-ruling-in-netherlands-climate-case/jcr_content/root/main/section/simple/text_1377231351_copy_multi_stream/1657006823005/460167304a697f411be1b9f80c6e05be0ac057fb/dutch-district-legal-case-faq.pdf&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1713560995402868&usg=AOvVaw302p-7cOPh1mW0215-olvgE.

104 Shell, "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on Dutch District Court Legal Case."

DECEPTIVE CLAIM

"Shell continually works to help our customers reduce their emissions through the products we sell. But, despite being a major global energy producer, Shell alone cannot directly influence the energy choices made by its customers."

Shell FAQ page on Dutch lawsuit, March 2022¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Big Oil is facing dozens of lawsuits throughout the U.S. and around the world that seek to hold the companies accountable for their well-documented climate deception¹⁰⁵ — including modern-day greenwashing and efforts to mislead consumers about the destructive impact of their products and business decisions.

From ad campaigns promoting fossil fuels as low-carbon climate solutions, to over-promised carbon capture technology, oil and gas companies have invested in creating a clean image while they simultaneously use front groups to block climate action, shift the blame to individuals, and expand their oil and gas production. This report highlights a set of core tactics oil giants use to paint themselves as leaders in climate solutions and obscure their active role in accelerating the climate crisis, but it's just a small glimpse at their ongoing efforts to mislead the public.

Big Oil's modern climate deception demands further investigation. In the face of an increasingly urgent climate crisis, federal and state officials, journalists, lawyers, and other key players should keep fighting to shine a light on this continued deception and hold the fossil fuel industry accountable.

105 Center for Climate Integrity, "Climate Accountability Lawsuits," Cases, accessed October 18, 2023, <https://climateintegrity.org/cases>.

