

## The fossil fuels industry – greenwash / hogwash



The global coal, oil and gas industries have tried to hide the impact that the burning their fuels has had and is having on the climate. The four biggest ones have been pretending to lead on combating climate change while they continued to expand fossil fuel production. They have been supported in this deception by their own trade associations. As shown in a recently published report by Center for Climate Integrity (Big Oil's Deceptive Climate Ads), BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell have falsely claimed that they want to lower carbon emissions whilst being fully committed to producing, and even increasing, oil and gas production. They have proudly announced that they have reduced their own greenhouse gas emissions but completely ignored that it is the burning of their products that have driven climate change. They have run advertising campaigns claiming that to have set targets to reduce emissions but on examining the details, it is clear that they are only referring to their own operations and ignoring everything else. For example, in 2002 BP said that they had reached their emissions reduction target eight years earlier than expected but that only accounted for 6 % of their total emissions. The 'big four' had promised to become net zero no later than 2050 but there is no evidence that they have changed how they do business and seemingly no long-term plans to do so. In fact, several of these companies have announced plans to expand their oil drilling activities. Projections suggest that oil produced by BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell and TotalEnergies between 2030 and 2050 will account for 12.5 % of the maximum amount that climate scientists calculate that can be emitted and still keep global warming to under 1.5 °C. That's 47 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent.

In 2024, natural gas was the largest contributor to the growth in greenhouse gas emissions and this had increased by 2.5 % from the previous year. The gas is often portrayed as being more 'climate friendly' than other fossil fuels but burning any fossil fuel releases CO<sub>2</sub> and burning the gas has exactly the same consequences as any other fossil fuel. In addition, natural gas is mostly methane, which is up to 80 times a more potent greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>, though it does break down over about 20 years, which CO<sub>2</sub> doesn't. A significant amount of natural gas leaks into the atmosphere but even if it does break down quickly, it will have increased global warming and that can't be reversed rapidly. The big oil companies have misrepresented the impact of using natural gas through a process of greenwashing. They have claimed that natural gas is part of the solution to climate change because it is cleaner than coal. It is true that when burnt, natural gas emits fewer undesirables than coal or oil-based fuels but it still emits huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>. These oil companies see natural gas as a way of maintaining, or even increasing their profits so they have invested heavily in its production. BP have marketed natural gas by claiming it is part of the mix that includes renewables (solar PV, wind etc). Similarly, ExxonMobil have linked the use of it to a cleaner energy future. It is quite clear that oil companies want to keep their profits flowing through the continued promotion of fossil fuels.

A few years ago, the big oil companies announced plans to invest in renewable energy production. They claimed to be investing large sums of money on research and development in this area, For example, ExxonMobil said it was working on biofuels and Chevron on geothermal power. Both BP and Shell advertised how much they were investing in renewables: BP claimed to be investing more than \$200 million in solar power. In reality, the amount of money being spent was a tiny fraction of their overall spend on R & D. It has been reported that between 2010 and 2018, BP spent 2.3 % of their R & D budget on renewables, Chevron 0.23 % and ExxonMobil 0.22 %. The rest was spent on oil production and marketing. With the USA backing away from developing renewables and instead promoting oil, the oil companies have likewise cut their interests in the area and started to expanding oil production. Both BP and Shell have sold off their holdings in renewable energy.

Individual consumers have their part to play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We can all work towards cutting our carbon footprint but we are still bombarded with adverts promoting fossil fuels. Esso has often advertised how motorists can save money by careful driving, which is true. But they are still promoting the use of petrol and diesel fuels. In reality, these companies are trying to shift the blame for the climate crisis onto consumers, blatantly ignoring the fact that they are selling the very products that are causing the damage. Their activities in the UK have been less obvious than, say, in the USA where the oil industry trade associations have lobbied and advertised vociferously against improving fuel efficiency, heat pumps and to any policies that would limit climate change. In the UK, the fossil fuel industry has influenced government decision-making in a more invisible way because the law is quite weak in this area. However, it has been found that representatives for the industry have worked to delay policies on the roll-out of heat pumps and lobbied for new oil and gas exploitation licences. The big oil companies have worked hard since 2010 to promote carbon capture and storage (CCS) as a way of allowing them to continue to promote fossil fuels. So far, they have had no success with this as no CCS systems are operating in the UK. The industry promised that CCS would be a cheap way of continuing oil production whilst removing the damaging CO<sub>2</sub> but analysis shows that the costs are too high to be economic. The other area where the fossil fuel industry has been particularly active is in lobbying against increasing electrification of buildings and transport. In Europe, including the UK, there have been campaigns to maintain a level playing field between the use of natural gas and oil as energy sources and electrification. In other parts of the world, they claim that fossil fuels are necessary to maintain affordability and energy security and that consumer choice must be protected.

Center for Climate Integrity: <https://climateintegrity.org/uploads/media/Big-Oil-Climate-Ads-2025.pdf>

Influence Map: <https://influencemap.org/multipage/Fossil-Fuels-9105>

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