

Science Denial & Deception Fueled the Climate Crisis

Together We Build, November 15, 2023

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

Over the years we have regularly written about actions we can personally take to make a difference in how habitable our planetary future is. One such article was published in print, page 5A, in the EP Trail Gazette on Friday, August 13, 2021. “Urgency of Climate Action Big, Small.” In that article we stress the importance of not letting despair over the situation create inaction. What you do does make a difference. You can read that article, with links to our sources, on our T.W. Beck Architects website.

This year just after our Independence Day celebrations, the executive director of Gen 180 “lays out how the fossil fuel industry has manipulated American consumers in climate inaction for decades.” (<https://generation180.org/blog/the-energy-180-taking-you-from-guilt-trip-to-power-trip/>) Published on July 5, 2023, on the generation180.org blog, Wendy Philleo states “If we really value independence as a nation, let’s fight to become independent from our reliance on dirty, polluting fossil fuels.” After citing multiple sources outlining the fossil fuel industry efforts to shift blame from themselves to consumers, she states “I want us to stop feeling guilty about not doing enough. I want us to get angry at what’s been taken from us, and at the same time hopeful about what’s possible. We would be in a very, very different place now if the fossil fuel industry and their allies had not obstructed action, time and time again, on climate for the past 40 years—leading us to the climate emergency we are in now.” She says “We need to move people beyond seeing themselves just as consumers and get them to exercise their other muscles—as citizens, voters, and as constituents.”

We just purchased the Kindle edition of Exxon: The Road Not Taken for less than a dollar. This eye opening collection of articles was published in 2015 by Inside Climate News after an 8 month investigation.

In reading the Scientific American article included in the Gen180 blog resources, we came across a “complimentary investigation” to the Inside Climate News “Exxon” one, done by the Union of Concerned Scientists, known as “The Climate Deception Dossiers.” The dossiers, a pdf of which is available for free online, presents evidence that scientists knew that emissions could affect global climate in the late 1800s. If we count this historical data in our calculations, scientists have been warning about this for well over 100 years. It is extremely discouraging to understand how much money, corporate resources and human energy has been applied to undermining valid research rather than using the science to develop products and processes to benefit humankind. Fossil fuel companies secretly funded so-called independent scientists to create a message of uncertainty about the truth of climate change, and the role fossil fuels play in it. The American Petroleum Institute (API) targeted educational institutions, and the industry propaganda outlined in the 1998 API roadmap “have been carried out, as evidenced by the API’s online curriculum for elementary schools that presents non-renewable energy sources such as oil, natural gas, and coal as “more reliable, affordable and convenient to use than most renewable energy resources.”” Much more about this can be read in Deception Dossier #2.

Other dossiers tell us about the creation of “astroturf” (fake grassroots) organizations, some created “from whole cloth” to discourage government climate intervention. Another gives us examples of the coal industry forging letters to Congress on “letterheads from respected constituent groups representing minorities, seniors, and women.”

This is not just decades old news. A story by Alice MacCarthy, "Exxon disputed climate findings for years. Its scientists knew better," published by The Harvard Gazette on January 12, 2023, summarizes a recently released Science.org analysis. "In "Assessing ExxonMobil's Global Warming Projections," researchers from Harvard and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research show for the first time the accuracy of previously unreported forecasts created by company scientists from 1977 through 2003." According to Geoffrey Supran, " lead author and former research fellow in the History of Science at Harvard. "What we found is that between 1977 and 2003, excellent scientists within Exxon modeled and predicted global warming with, frankly, shocking skill and accuracy only for the company to then spend the next couple of decades denying that very climate science.""

The practice of industry lobbying and influence continues to this day. We have recently seen evidence that powerful money sources have funded the lifestyle of members of the U.S. Supreme Court. The fossil fuel industry is working hard to convince local utilities that fossil fuel is the only reliable energy source. There continues to be enormous sums of money spent on propaganda.

So, what can we do to make a difference? We can stop assuming that it is all our, the individual consumer's, fault. That is what the fossil fuel advocates want you to think. We can vote. We can participate in local civics and require accountability from our local elected officials. We can demand transparency, and where we see disingenuous behavior we can hold it up to the light for all to see. We can ask hard questions and insist on straight answers. We can vote for clean energy. We can act for the sake of our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

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Beck, Thomas W. "[Science Denial & Deception Fueled the Climate Crisis](https://www.eptail.com/2023/11/16/together-we-build-science-denial-and-deception-fueled-the-climate-crisis/)" *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday November 17, 2023, <https://www.eptail.com/2023/11/16/together-we-build-science-denial-and-deception-fueled-the-climate-crisis/>