

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

Indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada and the Americas have experienced systematic and repeated violations by oil, gas, and mining industries infringing on our inherent right to protect our traditional lands and our treaty rights. These industries violate our human rights and create unconscionable destruction to traditional territories that have sustained us for time immemorial.

Oil and gas developments are neither sustainable nor renewable.

IEN INFORMATION SHEET:

ENERGY: FOSSIL FUELS

And Impacts to Indigenous Peoples

STATEMENT OF FACT ON ENERGY POLICY AND ITS IMPACT TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES OF NORTH AMERICA

Indigenous peoples in Canada, the United States and throughout the Americas hold valuable land and water resources that have long been exploited by the provincial, state and federal governments and by corporations trying to meet the energy needs of an industrialized world. Indigenous peoples have disproportionately suffered impacts due to the production and use of energy resources - coal mining, uranium mining, oil and gas extraction, coal bed methane, nuclear power and hydropower development – yet are among those who benefit least from these energy developments. Indigenous peoples face inequity over the control of, and access to, sustainable energy and energy services. Territories where Indigenous peoples live are resource rich and serve as the base from which governments and corporations extract wealth yet are areas where the most severe form of poverty exists.

FACTS ON THE IMPACTS OF FOSSIL FUELS

Fossil fuels supply over 80% of the world's energy needs. All fossil fuels, whether solid, liquid, or gas, are the result of organic plant materials being covered by successive layers of sediment over the course of millions of years.

Human consumption of oil, gas, coal bed methane and coal (fossil fuels) increases the production of greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide (CO₂) that is a major cause of climate change, global warming and changes in weather patterns.

Oil drilling and related activities fragment the landscape, leading to increased symptoms of neo-colonization, development, and deforestation. It also pollutes the land and water causing irreparable damage to fragile ecosystems.

The mining and drilling of coal, oil, gas, and other minerals result in substantial local environmental consequences. This includes severe degradation of air, forests, watersheds, rivers, oceans, fisheries, agricultural lands and biodiversity. Cultural impacts of fossil fuel development include the loss of access to traditional foods, the forced removal of people, land appropriation, the destruction of sacred and historical significant areas, the breakdown of Indigenous social systems, and violence against women and children. Fossil fuel development in these areas results in the accelerated loss of biodiversity, traditional knowledge, and ultimately in ethnocide and genocide.

Coal burnt to generate electricity produces toxic material and acid rain that severely pollutes the air, soil and water. It also releases mercury into our lakes where it contaminates our fish, traditional crops, wild rice, other aquatic life and traditional

food systems. The burning of fossil fuels for energy is a major source of air pollution, contributing in particular to acid rain and the greenhouse effect contributing to climate change and extreme weather events.

Coal is the single largest source of electricity in the United States. Coal-fired power plants provide fifty-three percent of the electricity used in the United States. The United States contains some of the largest coal deposits in the world. Coal is the United States most abundant fossil fuel. Coal deposits are found in 38 of the 50 states of the United States as well as on several Indigenous territories, for example, the *Navajo (Dine')* and *Crow* territories.

Coal mining on Indigenous lands in the United States causes environmental and human rights violations. Coal mining in the *Hopi* and the *Navajo* territories has forced *Navajo* and some *Hopi* Indigenous peoples to be relocated, to leave homelands that have sustained them for generations. Coal mining operations cause the displacement of communities, destruction of natural habitat, disruption of sacred sites, water depletion from surface, subsurface and aquifers, as well as the diversion of water away from our communities. Several Indigenous Peoples are also being approached to develop projects for the production of coal bed methane gas, which is associated with additional, long-term groundwater depletion and contamination problems.

Oil companies continue to seek development within Indigenous peoples' territories and within biological regions that sustain Indigenous peoples. In the United States arctic region, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, home to the *Gwich'in* peoples and the porcupine caribou herd, is threatened with oil development. Oil drilling and development of a petroleum industrial infrastructure within the pristine and fragile arctic ecosystem would devastate the calving grounds of the caribou and the lives of the *Gwich'in*. *Gwich'in* peoples' relationship with the caribou is beyond food subsistence. The relationship is both cultural and spiritual as well.

UNITED STATES

The United States is home to 4% of the world's population, yet consumes 26% of the world's energy. The United States is currently the largest energy market in the world and is right behind Canada when it comes to per capita consumption. The United States uses about 17 million barrels of oil every day, fossil fuels account for nearly 80% of United States energy, with natural gas, a third form of fossil fuel, accounting for roughly 23% of the United States energy usage. It takes the equivalent of 7 gallons of gasoline per day for every man woman and child to keep this country running at its current pace.

The United States consumes one quarter of the world's total oil production, but controls a mere 3 percent of known oil reserves. Oil comprises about 40 percent of the energy Americans consume and 97 percent of U.S. transportation fuels.

The United States Energy Plan proposes 1,300-1,900 new power plants, 38,000 miles of new gas pipelines, consider new nuclear-power plants, build new refineries and open new areas to oil exploration. Almost all of these power plants generate electricity by using fossil or nuclear fuels to heat water to produce the steam that spins the generators. While the exploration for new sources of fossil fuel, particularly natural gas, is currently underway, the availability of both water and water rights may actually be the key and limiting factor in the operation of new energy generation plants.

CANADA

Canadians consume more energy per capita than any other country. Canadians use more total energy than the 700 million people of Africa. Canadians are the third-largest per capita producers of greenhouse gases in the world. Each year the Alberta (Canada) Energy and Utilities Board processes more than 20,000 applications for new wells, pipelines and gas plants.

Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are increasing. Energy consumption grew about 13 per cent between 1990 and 1998, while emissions rose at a rate of 1.5 per cent annually, 17 per cent since 1990.

Canada's energy plan proposes to expand oil and gas production, particularly in the Alberta oil sands. The primary source of climate changing emissions is the burning of fossil fuels- oil, gas, and coal. Canada's emissions have risen 15 percent due to increased oil and gas production and increased coal-fired electricity production. The Alberta Tar Sands refinery (which produces 150,000 barrels of oil a day) releases the same amount of CO₂ per year as 1.35 million new cars.

Alberta Canada currently supplies more than 12 percent of American natural gas use. New pipelines designed to carry Canadian power south to United States markets are in all stages of development across the western boreal region - from Alaska, the Yukon and Northwest Territories to British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Very few, if any, of these projects will be assessed for their social and cultural costs or their cumulative environmental and health impacts, which would cause critical fragmentation of the boreal forest, disruption to Indigenous cultural life-ways and the production of greenhouse gases.

The social, ecological and cultural risks involved in a Canadian-United States northern oil and gas pipeline are huge. Alaska's North Slope holds an estimated 35 trillion cubic feet of known reserves. The Mackenzie Delta holds about nine trillion cubic feet. The exploration potential is even larger, with an estimated 65 trillion cubic feet waiting to be discovered in Alaska and a similar volume in the Northwest Territories of Canada. *Athabaskan* tribal members are concerned about mega-pipeline developments linking Arctic gas along the Mackenzie Valley from the Beaufort Sea to Alberta, Canada. This development is planned by some of the largest energy companies in the world.

The *Lubicon Lake Cree* are an Indigenous peoples living deep in the boreal forest zone of Canada's Alberta province that have been living for decades with the impacts of oil and gas drilling on their traditional lands. Like other Indigenous peoples across the Americas, the *Lubicon Cree* have been battling for years to receive recognition of their land rights and compensation for stolen wealth and environmental damage. They have struggled to halt and reduce the rapid pace of exploration and excessive destruction by roads and pipelines. The traditional homelands of the *Lubicon Cree*, near Peace River, Canada are now surrounded by 1,000 oil and gas wells.

Historically, energy development activities in Indigenous communities have been based upon western values of monetary profit to raise gross domestic product at the expense of the rights of Indigenous peoples and the recognition of our basic human rights. Indigenous values teach us that money cannot fully compensate for cultural losses, losses of traditional lands, debilitating illnesses, death, impure water, threats to long-term food security, or diminished economic autonomy.

FOSSIL CONNECTION TO CLIMATE JUSTICE ITS IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The burning of oil, gas, and coal, known collectively as fossil fuels is the primary source of human-induced climate change. By burning these fuels, humans are releasing carbon that has been sequestered in the ground for hundreds of million of years and are emitting carbon dioxide into the planet's thin and chemically volatile atmosphere at an unprecedented rate.

For over 150 years, industrial societies have been releasing carbon from underground coal and oil reserves, adding about 175 billion tons of CO₂ to the atmosphere since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Another 6 billion tons are being added each year, resulting in a 31% increase of CO₂ in the atmosphere since 1750.

Within the next 20 years, temperatures over land areas of North America, Europe and Northern Asia will increase as much as 5 to 15 degrees Fahrenheit over today's normal temperatures, well in excess of the global average (IPCC Report 1998).

Climate change, if not halted, will result in increased frequency and severity of storms, floods, drought and water shortage, the spread of disease, increased hunger, displacement and mass migration of people and ensuing social conflict.

The grave damages caused by a changing climate the pollution and the loss of our Indigenous territories, deterioration and destruction of our forests, our food security and our rich and diverse ecosystems. Climate change crisis is very evident in arctic regions where ice is thinning, thus affecting the land-based subsistence cultures of the Indigenous peoples. The climate change crisis is also most evident in low-lying coastal regions and in small Pacific Islands that are being flooded.

The United States energy plan not only promotes the increased burning of CO₂-producing fuels, it also plans to open pristine forests for drilling stations, pipelines, transmission lines and roads - a process that would increase global warming by releasing the carbon currently locked securely in the living trees and soil. The increasing demand and use of fossil fuels continues to impact vital areas through deforestation and pollution from drilling operations and ultimately forest degradation from the global climate imbalance.

What We Need to Do

The people of the Earth have too much of an reliance on fossil fuels, natural gas, coal, coal bed methane and oil. In order to halt the damages resulting from their use, we must find more ecologically sound and sustainable sources that do not threaten the Indigenous way of life or the entire Circle of Life. Sustainable energy can be defined as energy with minimal impact on the healthy functioning of the local and global ecosystem. Sustainable energy is energy with very few negative social, cultural, health and environmental impacts, and which can be supplied continuously to future generations on earth.

- We must respect our traditions and responsibility to protect the sacredness of our Mother Earth.
- We must get involved in federal energy legislation and oppose any legislation that supports the continued dependence on fossil fuels to supply the countries energy needs.
- Governments, utility and environmental regulators, energy producers, and energy resource tribes must shift energy supply away from fossil fuels, mega-hydro dams and nuclear power and toward clean renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and fuel cells. This must be done in ways that create living-wage jobs and build community wealth.
- Tell your Tribal government/First Nations to carefully consider the environmental and cultural consequences when looking at, or continuing any fossil fuel energy development (oil, gas, coal mining, coal-fired power plants, coal bed methane) on, or near Indigenous lands. We also know that local fossil fuel energy activities impact far and wide, even in other countries.
- Industrial countries of United States and Canada must immediately start phasing out its national dependence on a fossil fuel economy, support policies to immediately reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and seek legislative action for a just transition of workers, Tribes/First Nations, and communities that are impacted from a phase-out and reduction of CO₂ emissions.
- Support tree cover and improved management of forests, energy efficiency and conservation initiatives, and increased fuel economy standards. Innovative, affordable and prudent solutions are available to help reduce the severity of climate change.
- Support and invest in our Tribes/First Nations to pursue clean renewable energy projects where the abundant wind and solar resources can meet the growing demand for clean, renewable energy.
- Governments, industry and multi-lateral institutions should adopt and abide by a precautionary principle in all energy development decisions and policies, recognizing that each decision will have impacts on the future generations of all Peoples.
- We must tell the fossil fuel and coal mining industries to take corporate responsibility for their polluting ways.
- Governments must impose a legally binding obligation to restore all areas already affected by oil, gas, dams, coal exploration and exploitation by the corporations or public entities that are responsible. This restoration must be done such that Indigenous peoples can continue traditional uses of their lands.
- Governments must integrate external costs, such as human illness, environmental illness, cultural and spiritual degradation, and long-term cumulative effects into energy policy and pricing decisions and regulations. The governments must compile and compare the true costs of national energy policy and data for energy policy and planning purposes.
- Governments and utility regulators must adopt electricity-restructuring policies that offer affordable and stable electricity rates to Indigenous communities and local communities and eliminate subsidies to nuclear and fossil fuels, and expand cleaner energy solutions.

For more information on additional informational materials, statements and links to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups working on this issue, contact:

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