

Over 100 Leading Scientists Call for a Moratorium on New Oil Sands Development

Consensus statement says the science is clear: there can be no more oil sands development if we are to solve the global climate crisis

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June 10, 2015, Ottawa - Today more than 100 prominent scientists from across North America, including climate scientists, economists, geophysicists, and biologists, released a consensus statement entitled “Ten Reasons for a Moratorium” that shows why Canada and the United States should postpone new oil sands development.

“Based on evidence raised across our many disciplines, we offer a unified voice calling for a moratorium on new oil sands projects,” reads the consensus statement. “No new oil sands or related infrastructure projects should proceed unless consistent with an implemented plan to rapidly reduce carbon pollution, safeguard biodiversity, protect human health, and respect treaty rights. [Our] ten reasons, each grounded in science, support our call for a moratorium.”

“If Canada wants to participate constructively in the global effort to stop climate change, we should first stop expanding the oil sands. More growth simply shows Canada has gone rogue,” says Thomas Homer-Dixon, professor of governance innovation at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo.

The statement provides an up-to-date review of climate science, carbon economics, and biodiversity conservation. It shows there is little choice but to curtail further development if Canada and other countries are to meet global climate targets and keep the world from tipping into dangerous levels of warming. (The oil sands currently produce 2 million barrels a day.)

Bottom line, “Leading independent researchers show that significant expansion of the oil sands and similar unconventional oil sources is inconsistent with efforts to avoid potentially dangerous climate change,” says Simon Fraser University energy economist Mark Jaccard, one of the statement’s authors.

The impacts are not only limited to climate change. “Oil sands development is industrializing and degrading some of the wildest regions of the planet, contaminating its rivers, and transforming a landscape that stores huge amounts of carbon into one that releases it,” says Northern Arizona University ecologist Tom Sisk.

The document’s authors launched a website (www.OilSandsMoratorium.org) and held a press conference at 10 a.m. PST/1:00 p.m. EST on June 10 to explain the scientific reasons underlying their call for a moratorium. They also requested meetings with Canada’s federal political leaders to discuss how the science leads unequivocally to their call for a moratorium on oil sands expansion, and how a transition to low-emission energy production is possible for Canada without a dramatic reduction in economic growth.

The authors and signatories, who include 12 Fellows of the Royal Society of Canada, 22 Members of the US National Academy, 5 Recipients of the Order of Canada, and a Nobel Prize winner, say it's time that science is given a central role in the public debate about further development of North American oil sands.

The consensus statement draws a number of conclusions:

- Continued investment in oil sands production and infrastructure is not consistent with Canada's current climate targets and is incompatible with limiting climate warming to a level that society can handle without widespread harm.
- Contaminants from oil sands development permeate the land, water and air of the Canadian boreal and many of these impacts are difficult to mitigate;
- In Canada, there are few controls and no uniform standards regarding pollution and other impacts from oil sands mining;
- The oil sands industry's claim that its mine sites can be restored to their former natural state is not true;
- Development of the oil sands violates the title and rights of many Aboriginal peoples of North America.

"It's rare that scientists speak collectively about controversial topics. Many of us had come to our own conclusions about the oil sands based on our research, and once we began comparing notes, we recognized the need to speak publicly, now, with a unified voice" said Simon Fraser University ecologist Wendy Palen.

Call-in Press Conference:

Wednesday, June 10, 10 a.m. PT, 1:00 p.m. ET

Phone: Local number: 416-340-2217, Toll-free number (Canada/US): 1 866-696-5910

Conference ID: 4228633

Hashtag: #103scientists

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For a full list of authors and signatories, and to learn more about the scientists' initiative, please visit www.OilSandsMoratorium.org