

Climate Change Deniers: A Research Paper on the Misinformation Campaigns  
Spread by the Fossil Fuel Industry

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*Over the past few decades the fossil fuel industry has been exposed of financing a long-term climate change denial movement. This paper discusses the movement and the multiple aspects that make up the fraudulent scam.*

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## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Anthropogenic Global Warming and How to Stop it .....	4
Climate Change Skepticism: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry doesn't want you to believe in Global Warming .....	4
Climate Deception.....	5
Peabody Energy.....	5
ExxonMobil .....	6
Front Groups .....	7
Corrupt Science .....	8
Anti-Climate Science Curriculum .....	9
Other Propaganda .....	9
Dark Money .....	10
Conclusion .....	10
Works Cited.....	11

# Climate Change Deniers: A Research Paper on the Misinformation Campaigns Spread by the Fossil Fuel Industry

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## Introduction

Anthropogenic Global Warming is an issue extremely relevant to society today. Even though there is a consensus among scientists that global warming is not a theory and should be acted on immediately, the media and public policymakers portray an uncertainty regarding climate science. Some experts, such as Ross Gelbspan, believe that the Fossil Fuel industry is secretly promoting the climate denial movement, working backstage by funding climate skeptics and anti-climate science organizations. Many fossil fuel companies -including Exxon Mobil- have made it their mission to spread false information on climate change, all in hopes to establish a climate skeptic mindset among the public. If the public doesn't accept global warming as the truth, the fossil fuel industry will continue to reign over the world and destroy the planet all in the effort to make a profit.

## Anthropogenic Global Warming and How to Stop it

Anthropogenic Global Warming is a theory used to explain the global temperature rise and other environmental issues today. The idea is that climate change is caused by humans and the greenhouse gasses emitted by human activity. Since the industrial revolution, greenhouse gas emissions have dramatically increased, and virtually all scientists directly relate this to climate change.

To explain global warming simply: Earth transforms the sun's visible energy into infrared light. Infrared light leaves the Earth slowly because it is absorbed by greenhouse gasses. Greenhouse gas emissions are going up, so infrared energy is leaving earth even more slowly, simultaneously raising the Earth's temperature (Global Warming, Explained in about a Minute). The only way to stop the temperature from continuing to rise is to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The fossil fuel industry emits most of the world's greenhouse gas pollution, so switching to alternative, clean energy is the ultimate solution. Making this switch would severely hurt the industry, which is why they don't want the public believing in climate change.

## Climate Change Skepticism: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry doesn't want you to believe in Global Warming

It's apparent that the fossil fuel industry doesn't want the public believing in Climate change. But, the reason behind the denial movement isn't always understood. To makes things concise: The fossil fuel industry makes a lot of money. In 2014 public companies involved in extracting, transporting, refining, distributing, and trading fossil fuels in the U.S. and Canada made a profit of 257 billion dollars. That isn't even including the estimated 115-billion-dollar profit from private companies like Koch Industries (Priceofoil.org). Since cutting fossil fuel emissions is the easiest and smartest way to prevent climate change, it is obvious why the

industry opposes that idea. Once emissions are cut and renewable resources are found the fossil industry will cease to exist and most, if not all, of the companies will go bankrupt.

### Climate Deception

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a nonprofit science advocacy organization based out of Cambridge Massachusetts, conducted a report in 2015 in hopes to reveal decades of deliberate climate change misinformation. UCS pulled evidence from eighty-five documents obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). The report revealed that the biggest fossil fuel companies, despite being aware of climate change, spent tens of millions of dollars promoting climate science skepticism (The Climate Deception Dossiers). The companies include but are not limited to BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Peabody Energy, Royal Dutch Shell, and the American Petroleum Institute. The Fossil fuel industry promoted its campaign in various ways. The companies went as far as creating industry front groups, secretly funding contrarian anti-climate-change scientists, and illegally forging letters from nonprofit advocacy groups to try to persuade members of congress into the climate denial mindset. Many of these listed companies provided financial support to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC works behind the scenes to spread misinformation and influence public policy makers (The Climate Deception Dossiers).

### Peabody Energy

Peabody Energy is America's biggest coal mining company, and the world's largest private sector. This coal giant has publicly denied climate science since the media and public first became aware of the idea of global warming. After recently filing for bankruptcy in April of this year, Peabody's files include a long history of climate denial backed funding (Suzanne Goldenberg, Helena Bengtsson).

According to The Guardian journalists Suzanne Goldenberg and Helena Bengtsson, Peabody has funded at least two dozen groups that cast doubt on anthropogenic global warming. Trade associations, corporate lobby groups, industry front groups, conservative think-tanks, and well-known contrarian scientists, all received direct funding from Peabody. This was all in the effort to spread anti-climate change propaganda in order to keep the public from knowing the truth about AGW. Among Peabody's beneficiaries are The center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change (Center that wrongfully insisted Carbon Dioxide was "the Elixir of life."), The American Legislative Exchange Council, The George C Marshall institute, and countless other industry front groups. Peabody also funded research for contrarian scientists like Richard Lindzen and Willie Soon (Suzanne Goldenberg, Helena Bengtsson).

### [ExxonMobil](#)

In 2014 InsideClimateNews began an eight-month investigation on ExxonMobil's climate change denial movement. It was discovered that in the early 1970's ExxonMobil started questioning the impacts of fossil fuel emissions on the environment. James F. Black, a senior company scientist for Exxon Research, addressed Exxon's management committee in July of 1977 saying Carbon Dioxide emissions would ultimately harm the planet and endanger humanity (David Hasemayer, John H. Cushman Jr). He further explained that "some countries would benefit but others would have their agricultural output reduced or destroyed." Exxon responded to Black by partnering with many universities to extensively research the dangers of climate change (David Hasemayer, John H. Cushman Jr).

Unfortunately, in the late 1980's Exxon realized how much money it was sacrificing by supporting climate science and began to put all its efforts into spreading doubt and uncertainty regarding climate change. Exxon used the American Petroleum Institute, conservative think-

tanks, and its own lobbying to push skepticism on AGW in hopes to reduce cuts in fossil fuel emissions- even playing a role in stopping the Kyoto Protocol (David Hasemayer, John H. Cushman Jr). ExxonMobil had the power to shed light on the dangers of Global warming, but instead focused on the company's profits instead- a serious mistake that will affect the planet harshly.

### Front Groups

*Climate of Doubt* is a documentary aired in 2012 on PBS Frontline. The film covers a broad range of topics relating to the climate denial movement. The main focus of the documentary was the Heartland Institute, a conservative think-tank front group, and its anti-global warming agenda (*Climate of Doubt*). A front group is an organization with the sole purpose of representing one specific agenda- whether that be anthropogenic global warming, gun safety laws, or reproductive rights. The Competitive Institute and the Heartland Institute are two prominent anti-climate science groups. Not only are these groups funded by several fossil fuel corporations, such as Koch Industries and ExxonMobil, but they fund and spread the climate denial movement in various ways (*Climate of Doubt*).

The institutes frequently host conferences dedicated to spreading the disinformation and uncertainty of climate science. They rely on the research of contrarian scientists, like Willie Soon and Fred Singer, to base their opinions on. Unfortunately, both mentioned scientists have confessed to receiving funds from the fossil fuel industry, making their research unreliable and possibly corrupt (*Climate of Doubt*).

## Corrupt Science

The Global Warming reader, an anthology written by Bill Mckibben, includes an excerpt of Ross Gelbspan's best seller *The Heat Is On*. The excerpt discusses multiple scientists and situations that were funded by the fossil fuel industry. Ross Gelbspan is a notable author, journalist, and environmentalist. (*The Heat Is Online*)

In May of 1995, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission was put in charge of determining the effects of burning coal in Minnesota power plants. The Western Fuels Association hired four climate science skeptics to testify in court on the matter (Gelbspan, 112). The skeptics included Richard Lindzen, Pat Michaels, Robert Balling, and Willett Kempton. Each skeptic voiced his opinion on coal's effect on the environment – all dismissing global warming as a hoax. Sure enough, shortly after the hearing, all of the testifying scientists were exposed of receiving funds from the fossil fuel industry (Gelbspan, 114-118). Western Fuels, Cyprus Minerals, and countless other companies were caught funding contrarian scientists' anti-climate science research (Gelbspan, 115).

According to Gelbspan, most climate science skeptics try to keep their funds privately disclosed. Nevertheless, Dr. Fred Singer is very forthcoming about his fossil fuel industry-backed funding. The skeptic has never denied receiving funds nor has he apologized for it (Gelbspan, 121). Singer is an American physicist and an environmental professor at the University of Virginia. He is most popular for his opposing views on climate science. Singer has admitted to receiving money from Exxon, Shell, ARCO, Unocal, and Sun oil. He states that his scientific finds predate the funding and isn't influenced by it (Gelbspan, 122).



## Anti-Climate Science Curriculum

In 2012 DeSmogBlog , a blog dedicated to shedding light on the climate change misinformation campaigns, received confidential documents from an insider at the Heartland Institute. The documents revealed a scheme that included spending 100,000 dollars to spread climate uncertainty curriculum in k-12 schools. These documents have not been proven authentic but the Heartland Institute said only one of the leaked documents was forged (Horn, Steve). And in 2013 The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) started pushing “model bills” enforcing the teaching of climate denial in public schools. The goal of these bills is to influence students that climate science is only a theory and that scientists are all very uncertain about the realities of global warming. Between 2008 and 2012 ALEC introduced its “Environmental Literacy Improvement Act” in eleven states and it has been passed in four – Louisiana, Tennessee, Texas, and South Dakota (Horn, Steve).

These pieces of legislation are written by corporate lobbyists. And ALEC raised most of its funding from the fossil fuel industry. The Heartland Institute and ALEC collaborated on these climate denial bills and ALEC is heavily endorsed by the Institute (Horn, Steve).

## Other Propaganda

Another example of the climate denial movement would be when the Heartland Institute released an advertisement in 2012 comparing climate change believers to terrorists. The add was placed on a billboard in Chicago, and featured Ted Kaczynski’s mug shot, along with the caption of “I still believe in global warming. Do you?” The ad brought an extra 10,000 people the Institute’s website, which further promotes climate skepticism (Morton, Adam). The Institute is said to have more ads in the works, featuring frightening figures like Charles Manson, Fidel Castro, and even Osama bin Laden (Morton, Adam). The purpose of these ridiculous

advertisements is to convince people that believing in climate change is an unreasonably insane mistake.

### Dark Money

In 2013 Robert Brulle, an environmental sociologist at Drexel University, conducted a study to track down the funding behind the climate denial movement. This study revealed that the most consistent money fueling the movement comes from concealed donations (Fischer, Douglas). Donors are using third party pass-through foundations like DonorsTrust and Donors Capital to remain anonymous. From 2003 to 2010 140 foundations funneled 558 million dollars to roughly 100 climate denial organizations. According to Brulle, any traceable donations come from more traditional sources like ExxonMobil and the Koch industries (Fischer, Douglas). But, between 2008 and 2012, funding from popular companies has decreased, and private funding has skyrocketed. 75 percent of climate denial funding comes from private sources. This causes Brulle to believe that the fossil fuel industry is keeping their donations private so the climate denial movement doesn't lead directly to it (Fischer, Douglas).

### Conclusion

The climate change misinformation campaign is a multi-faceted scheme that has already embedded itself into society today. Regardless of all the different forces contributing to the campaign, almost everything leads back to the fossil fuel industry. The only way to prevent the tyrannical industry from spreading false information is for the public to accept the scientific consensus on climate change. Alas, it is hard for unity to progress when the uncertainty of global warming is being so vastly spread and accepted.

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