

Climate Science vs. Fossil Fuel Fiction

An Infographic from the Union of Concerned Scientists

www.ucsusa.org/fossilfuelfiction

Source Material and Background Information March 2015

“It’s not known for sure whether (a) climate change actually is occurring, or (b) if it is, whether humans really have any influence on it.” – American Petroleum Institute, 1998

Source

This quote is from a 1998 leaked memo from the American Petroleum Institute that laid out the organization’s draft Global Climate Science Communications Plan:ⁱ

The memo describes an effort to initiate “...a national media relations programme to inform the media about uncertainties in climate science; to generate national, regional and local media on the scientific uncertainties and thereby educate and inform the public, stimulating them to raise questions with policymakers,” and the group would declare victory when:

- “Average citizens understand (recognise) uncertainties in climate science; recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the ‘conventional wisdom’
- Media ‘understands’ (recognises) uncertainties in climate science
- Those promoting the Kyoto treaty on the basis of extant science appear to be out of touch with reality.”

Exposing the Disinformation: Science Facts

At the time of this quote, the scientific evidence of the cause and impacts of climate change was well documented. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 in recognition of the problem of global warming. Through the IPCC, climate experts from around the world synthesize the most recent climate science findings in periodic reports. The first IPCC Assessment in 1990 said “...emissions resulting from human activities are substantially increasing atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases [...] these increases will enhance the greenhouse effect, resulting on average in an additional warming on the Earth’s surface.”ⁱⁱ The 1995 IPCC report concluded that “the balance of evidence suggests that there is a

discernible human influence on global climate” and that “most of these studies [assessments of statistical significance of observed global mean surface temperature trend over the last century] have detected a significant change and show that the observed warming trend is unlikely to be entirely natural in origin.”ⁱⁱⁱ

More about the American Petroleum Institute (API)

The American Petroleum Institute (API) is a trade association for the oil and gas industry. API members include ExxonMobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, BP, and Shell. API’s lobbying efforts primarily focus on U.S. Federal energy and climate policies, consistently opposing federal regulations of greenhouse gases and seeking to cast doubt on climate science.^{iv}

A 1998 leaked memo reveals a “draft communication plan” that carefully lays out the climate science misinformation strategies carried out by fossil fuel companies and their trade groups, demonstrating that these efforts were carefully planned and orchestrated by the fossil fuel industry.

The American Petroleum Institute convened a team—known as the Global Climate Science Communications Team—to develop a plan, targeting the media, schools, government officials, Congress, and other influential groups. The intention of the group, as laid out in this memo, is to initiate “...a national media relations programme to inform the media about uncertainties in climate science; to generate national, regional and local media on the scientific uncertainties and thereby educate and inform the public, stimulating them to raise questions with policymakers,” and the group would declare victory when:

- “Average citizens understand (recognise) uncertainties in climate science; recognition of uncertainties becomes part of the ‘conventional wisdom’”
- Media ‘understands’ (recognises) uncertainties in climate science
- Those promoting the Kyoto treaty on the basis of extant science appear to be out of touch with reality.”^v

API continues to question the science of climate change in efforts to block action on limiting global warming emissions. In 2011, API and a coalition of other industry groups filed a lawsuit petitioning the EPA’s endangerment finding (which allows the EPA to regulate greenhouse gas emissions) stating that: “The Endangerment Rule is invalid because EPA professes to be 90–99% certain that anthropogenic emissions are mostly responsible for “unusually high current planetary temperatures,” but the record does not remotely support this level of certainty.”^{vi}

ⁱWalker, Joe. 1998. Draft global climate science communications plan. Memorandum to API’s Global Climate Science Team. Online at http://www.euronet.nl/users/e_wesker/ew@shell/API-prop.html, accessed December 9, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 1990. Policymakers summary. In *IPCC First Assessment Report*, edited by J.T. Houghton, G.J. Jenkins, and J.J. Ephraums. Online at https://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/far/wg_1/ipcc_far_wg_1_spm.pdf, accessed March 4, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 1995. IPCC second assessment synthesis of scientific-technical information relevant to interpreting article 2 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. In *IPCC Second Assessment Report*, edited by Bolin, B., J.T. Houghton, G.M. Filho, R.T. Watson, M.C. Zinyowera, J. Bruce, H. Lee, B. Callander, R. Moss, E. Haites, R.A. Moreno, T. Banuri, Z. Dadi, B. Gardner, J. Goldemberg, J.C. Hourcade, M. Jefferson, J. Melillo, I. Mintzer, R. Odingo, M. Parry, M. Perdomo, C. Quennet-Thielen, P. Vellinga, and N. Sundararaman. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. Online at <https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/climate-changes-1995/ipcc-2nd-assessment/2nd-assessment-en.pdf>, accessed February 25, 2015.

^{iv} The Center for Media and Democracy. 2014. American petroleum institute. PR Watch, May 1. Online at http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=American_Petroleum_Institute, accessed February 26, 2015.

^v Walker, Joe. 1998. Draft global climate science communications plan. Memorandum to API's Global Climate Science Team. Online at http://www.euronet.nl/users/e_wesker/ew@shell/API-prop.html, accessed December 9, 2014.

^{vi} Coalition for Responsible Regulation, et al., v. United States Environmental Protection Agency and Lisa P. Jackson, Administrator. 2010. 09 U.S. 1322.