

Report: U.S. Oil and Gas Expansion Threatens to Unleash Climate Pollution Equivalent to Nearly 1,000 Coal Plants

Groups outline five-point 'checklist' for U.S. politicians to show real leadership towards a rapid and just phase-out of fossil fuels

By [Oil Change International](#)

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The U.S. oil and gas industry has the potential to unleash the largest burst of new carbon emissions in the world through 2050, [new research](#) released today has found. Without action to curtail this unprecedented expansion of drilling from Texas to North Dakota to Pennsylvania and beyond, new U.S. oil and gas development could enable 120 billion tons of new carbon pollution – equivalent to the lifetime emissions of nearly 1,000 coal-fired power plants.

The findings come on the heels of the “Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C” from the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the U.S.’s Fourth National Climate Assessment, which both detailed the intensifying human and economic toll of unchecked climate change. Previous [research](#) has shown that existing oil and gas fields and coal mines already contain enough carbon to push the world beyond the goals of the Paris Agreement. The permitting of new extraction projects and related infrastructure is completely out of synch with meeting climate targets, and also out of step with a massive movement of communities fighting the fossil fuel industry around the country.

“Our findings present an urgent and existential emergency for lawmakers in the United States at all levels of government. The oil and gas industry is expanding further and faster in the United States than in any other country at precisely the time when we must begin rapidly decarbonizing to prevent runaway climate disaster,” said Kelly Trout, report co-author and senior research analyst at Oil Change International. “We’re at this crisis point because of failing political decisions to allow unfettered fracking, permit a massive buildout of pipelines, lift the crude export ban, and subsidize a climate-wrecking industry with billions of taxpayer dollars. If U.S. leaders do not start saying ‘no’ to this industry and put policies in place for a managed decline of fossil fuel production, they could cripple the world’s chances of staving off climate catastrophe.”

Additional key findings of the report include:

- Between now and 2030, when climate scientists say global carbon emissions should be nearly halved, the U.S. is on track to account for 60% of the world’s projected growth in oil and gas production.
- Some 90% of U.S. drilling into new oil and gas reserves through 2050 would

depend on fracking; nearly 60% of the carbon emissions enabled by new U.S. drilling would come from the epicenters of fracking – the Permian Basin of Texas and New Mexico and the Appalachian Basin across Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio.

- The Permian Basin alone would exhaust some 10% of the entire world’s carbon budget (for 1.5°C of warming).
- U.S. coal mining should be phased out by 2030 or sooner if the world is to equitably achieve the Paris Agreement goals, which means at least 70% of the coal in existing U.S. mines should stay in the ground.

Co-author and Oil Change International senior research analyst Lorne Stockman stated,

“This administration and its fossil fuel backers portray climate change as a false choice between the economy and the environment. In reality, they favor an irresponsible and outdated fossil fuel sector over a clean energy sector that has proven it can deliver on jobs, economic growth, and reliable cheap energy. It is past time the United States led the transition needed to safeguard life on our planet by rejecting oil, gas, and coal. There is no more time to waste.”

The report defines a five-point checklist for what U.S. policymakers must do to show real climate leadership:

1. Ban new leases or permits for new fossil fuel exploration, production, and infrastructure;
2. Plan for the phase-out of existing fossil fuel projects in a way that prioritizes environmental justice;
3. End subsidies and other public finance for the fossil fuel industry;
4. Champion a Green New Deal that ensures a just transition to 100% renewable energy; and
5. Reject the influence of fossil fuel money over U.S. energy policy.

“This report should be a wake-up call for elected officials who consider themselves to be climate leaders. We need a complete overhaul of our economy with a Green New Deal, and that overhaul must include standing up to the fossil fuel industry in order to take us off this path of devastation for our climate and communities. Anything less than a full, swift, and just managed decline of fossil fuel production is too little, too late,” Trout said.

The report, entitled [*Drilling towards Disaster: Why U.S. oil and gas expansion is incompatible with climate limits*](#), was researched and written by Oil Change International and is being released in partnership with the following organizations who have endorsed the findings of the report: Amazon Watch, BOLD Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Earthworks, Friends of the Earth U.S., Food & Water Watch, Greenpeace USA, Hip Hop Caucus, Indigenous Environmental Network, Labor Network for Sustainability, Oil Change USA, Our Revolution, People’s Action, Rainforest Action Network, Sierra Club, Working Families Party, and 350.org.

The report can be found [here](#).

Reactions from partners endorsing the report:

“This landmark report clearly lays out the grim reality of our addiction to fossil fuels. It’s a reality that Indigenous peoples have been saying for decades: that we are destroying the ecosystems of Mother Earth and placing countless lives at risk because of fossil fuels,” said Dallas Goldtooth, Keep it in the Ground Campaigner for the Indigenous Environmental Network. “It is time for all leaders to wake up! We must keep fossil fuels in the ground and justly transition our society to renewable, sustainable energy right now! The clock is ticking.”

“Addressing the climate crisis by only considering fossil fuel demand is fighting with one hand tied behind our back,” said Nicole Ghio, Senior Fossil Fuels Program Manager at Friends of the Earth. “To avert climate disaster, we need a Green New Deal that protects workers, empowers communities, and phases out all fossil fuels.”

“It’s clearer by the day that we’re drilling toward a climate catastrophe,” said Shaye Wolf, climate science director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Every new lease, permit and subsidy granted to this dirty industry pushes us closer to disaster. America’s oil and gas production is a carbon bomb we must defuse through a thoughtful phase-out and a just transition to clean energy.”

“This report confirms what our indigenous allies have known for decades: we must keep fossil fuels in the ground,” said Kevin Koenig, Climate and Energy Director at Amazon Watch. “We are already in a hole and we cannot afford to dig ourselves any deeper by continuing to expand oil and gas infrastructure – in the United States, the Amazon, or anywhere else. It’s past time for the United States to make a plan to get off fossil fuels altogether and this report provides a road map for policy makers to do just that, providing critical information to ensure sustainable communities and a healthy planet for generations to come.”

“To make the most impact on climate change we need to stop all oil, coal, and gas expansion, massively accelerate the growth of renewable energy, and support workers with a just transition to a sustainability-based economy and climate-impacted communities with a just recovery from extreme weather. To make this a reality, we have to hold corporate polluters and political leaders accountable for their role in putting us in harm’s way. Without stopping oil, coal, and gas expansion as soon as possible, though, we won’t get anywhere close to where we need to be to stave off the worst of climate change,” said Janet Redman, Greenpeace USA Climate and Energy Director.

“Right now, we’re on a sinking boat, and instead of just scooping water out, we must take immediate action to patch the hole where it’s gushing in,” said Patrick McCully, Climate and Energy Program Director at Rainforest Action Network. “This means we must put a full-stop to fossil fuel expansion, or we all sink into climate chaos. U.S. policymakers – as well as the private sector, like the Wall Street banks that are funding this extraction – must facilitate phasing out extraction while phasing in an equitable transition to renewable energy that supports communities and workers.”

“This latest report adds even more urgency to the need for a just transition off of fossil fuels to a renewable energy economy. To prevent the worst impacts of climate change, we must keep oil, coal, and gas in the ground,” said May Boeve, Executive Director, 350.org. “It’s time for public officials at every level to follow the lead of communities on the frontlines of the climate crisis and support bold climate policy.”

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