

Five reasons to support no new approvals in the tar sands

Northern Alberta's tar sands are home to 173 billion barrels of recoverable bitumen, a tar-like substance that requires intensive processing to become gas. The mining process spans an area twice the size of New Brunswick, where close to 1.4 million barrels are produced daily.

A diverse group of voices are calling for no new approvals in the tar sands. This is a first step in reducing further environmental and social destruction caused by the tar sands. The ultimate goal is to prevent increased tar sands production and reverse the damage caused.

Here are five reasons to support no new approvals in the tar sands:

1. First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights are overlooked.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the North West Territories are directly experiencing the negative impacts of tar sands development. Faced with environmental, health and social problems connected to mining, processing and pipeline construction, communities are not receiving adequate support and compensation, nor have they had a say in the approvals process. In Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, downstream from the tar sands, unusually high rates of rare forms of cancer in community members, and high levels of carcinogens in Lake Athabasca water and fish are recorded. Three of the five First Nations that make up the Athabasca Tribal Council are calling for a moratorium on new approvals, as does the all Chiefs Summit of Alberta. Tar sands expansion within aboriginal traditional territories is not recognizing the process of aboriginal title and treaty rights.

2. There are dramatic environmental impacts.

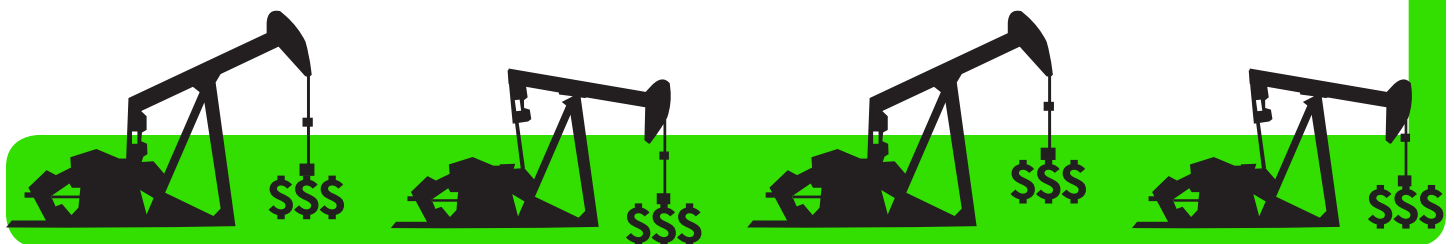
The tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and threaten our country's capacity to meet Kyoto Protocol commitments. Up to approximately three times more greenhouse gases are produced to process bitumen than conventional oil production. For open pit mines in the tar sands to produce one barrel of oil, four tons of material is dug up. Large tracts of boreal forest are also being ripped up. Despite assurances, "land reclamation" – attempts to replace the torn-up earth –



has seen very little progress. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) has been used as a "catch all" for continued support for tar sands development. Combined, the Canadian and the Albertan governments are spending \$2.5 billion on CCS. Yet when the CBC filed an access to information request, a government document was discovered saying that reducing greenhouse gas emissions using CCS will be much more difficult than industry and some politicians suggest. The report reveals that only a small percentage of carbon dioxide released by the tar sands can be captured.

3. Market interests are put ahead of Canadian interests.

The tar sands are the centrepiece of post 9/11 energy integration with the United States (the American administration includes energy in their calls for "security"), which hands over control of Canadian energy resources to corporations and the market at the expense of Canadian needs and the environment. This agenda is being relentlessly pursued through free trade agreements and free market rules. It is estimated that close to three quarters of tar sands produced-oil is exported to the U.S. – the US Department of Defense is now the largest single consumer of oil in the world. NAFTA's proportional sharing clause ensures that we cannot cut back on the proportion of energy we export to the U.S., even if this is done to meet



Canadian needs, or Kyoto commitments. The Oil Sands Working Group with the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) calls for a five-fold increase of tar sands production.

4. Tar sands production wastes and contaminates water.

Tar sands production is responsible for both the depletion and contamination of water in Alberta. On average, two to five barrels of water are needed to produce one barrel of oil while some extraction methods require as much as seven barrels of water. Tar sands mining projects are licensed to withdraw 2.3 billion barrels of freshwater per year. According to Natural Resources Canada, planned expansions will increase this to 3.3 billion barrels per year. The Athabasca River will not be able to sustain this volume of withdrawal. The separation of bitumen from tar sands also produces large amounts of toxic water which is then stored in massive tailings ponds that cover an area of approximately 20 square miles. According to several reports, these ponds have already leaked toxins into rivers and groundwater. Toxins connected to tar sands production have been found as far downstream as the Athabasca delta – one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. With production growth and an increased strain on groundwater, the potential for accidents leading to the contamination of one of the largest aquifers (which many in situ projects sit below), is very high.

5. Boom for Whom?

Energy, in particular the tar sands, is often touted as a major driver of Canada's economy. Although lucrative to large corporations, oil and gas production is very costly on environmental and social fronts. Canadian oil and gas royalties are some of the lowest in the world. Norway has significantly higher royalties (while maintaining investment interest) that are invested into "green" energy and diversifying their economy to plan for the eventual bust of a resource boom. While the rapid pace of tar sands development has helped increase the value of the Canadian dollar, there are serious impacts on the manufacturing sector. Housing and infrastructure needs in Alberta have lagged behind development, leaving people in a crunch and temporary guest workers in the tar sands are faced with the threat of deportation at the discretion of employers. Pipeline construction and work migration also have cross-Canada environmental and social impacts.



Take Action!

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Resources

Too Close for Comfort by Maude Barlow; www.canadians.org/energy; <http://www.ienearth.org/cits.html>; tarsandswatch.org; tarsandstimeout.org; <http://www.dominionpaper.ca/articles/1474>; www.oilsandstruth.org; www.environmentaldefence.ca; http://www.nrdc.org/energy/dirtyfuels_tar.asp

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