

# The environmentally devastating tar sands and links to the 2010 Games

## *2010 Olympics Should Stand for More*

The Olympic ideal of friendly international competition between athletes who excel in their respective sports is a positive goal. The Council of Canadians understands and appreciates the pleasure and enjoyment so many around the world share in the spectacle and achievements of the Olympic Games. However, with less than half a year until the Games begin, we are gravely concerned by the increasing evidence that these worthy aspects are being overwhelmed, if not totally supplanted, by an “Olympic industry” focused on real estate development and massive corporate marketing opportunities. One that is founded and based in undemocratic and unaccountable national and international structures, and implicated in numerous corruption scandals that undermine everything a truly noble Olympic movement should stand for.

The February 2010 Olympic Games, which will be held in Vancouver and Whistler, B.C., will leave a negative legacy that is contrary to the goals set forward during the application and approval process to host the games. There is now no doubt that the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC) and its affiliated partners will fail to meet their commitments with regard to the environment, social programs and fiscal accountability.

While VANOC may want the 2010 Games to be the greenest Olympics in history, there is no way this is possible when corporate sponsors are involved in one of the most environmentally destructive projects on earth – the tar sands.

### **What are Canada’s tar sands?**

Producing more than 1 million barrels daily, the extraction and processing of bitumen in the tar sands is very energy intensive. The tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the country and there are predictions that output will double as soon as 2013. Nearby First Nations communities have raised concerns about unusually high rates of cancers, and the lack of treaty rights recognition. The mining process requires that large tracts of boreal forest – often referred to as the lungs of our planet – to be destroyed. Water sources are also negatively impacted. On average, two to five barrels of water are needed to produce one barrel of oil. Large amounts of toxic water stored in massive tailings ponds are leaking.

According to a recent report, 11 million litres of contaminated water leak from these toxic ponds daily. More than half of tar sands crude is exported to the U.S., meanwhile Canada has no real plan to transition to a low carbon future and ensure Cana-



dian’s energy security. There are also plans for environmentally destructive pipelines ripping through B.C. to access ecologically sensitive coastal waters to ship crude to international markets.

### **The tarring of the Olympics**

Corporate sponsorship of the Olympics which have been referred to as one of the most effective international marketing platforms in the world, provides corporations in the tar sands a prime opportunity to give their corporate image a needed “green and socially responsible sheen.”

### **Corporate greenwashing:**

Source: Corpwatch

**green\*wash:** (gr~en-wosh) -washers, -washing, -washed 1.) The phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty.

**Hogwash.** Corp where corporations sponsor social and environmental responsibility projects helping to give their corporate reputation a “green sheen” while covering up that their profits are being earned by causing significant social and environmental harm.

Here are some examples:

### **Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)**

RBC is the top financier of tar sands projects and is a National Partner for the 2010 Games, as well as a sponsor of the Torch Relay along with Coca-Cola. RBC is crucial to the ongoing development of the tar sands. As reported by the Rainforest Action Network, RBC has issued more than \$2.3 billion in loans and financed more than \$6.9 billion in debt between 2003 and 2007 for 13 companies involved in tar sands mining. This direct link between RBC and the tar sands exposes RBC’s conflicting message to “make a better Canada” pledge for torch-bearer hopefuls, which includes an emphasis on good “green” deeds. If RBC wants to have their green message taken seriously, it should stop funding the tar sands.

### **Suncor Energy Inc.**

Suncor is the oldest and second largest corporate player in the tar sands. Suncor’s 2009 production in the tar sands (as of Au-

gust) averaged approximately 294,000 barrels per day. News broke in March 2009 of the merger of Suncor with PetroCanada creating an energy giant. PetroCanada, once a state-owned company, is also heavily involved in the tar sands and has a 12 per cent stake in Syncrude, the tar sands largest producer.

This merger is significant for a number of reasons including the fact that it introduces Suncor and tar sands profits into the Games – PetroCanada is a National Partner for the 2010 Games.

### **Teck Corporation and TransCanada**

The Teck Corporation, an official supporter of the Olympics, is one of the biggest mining companies in Canada. The company is involved in the development of the Frontier and Equinox tar sands projects, which will rely on environmentally destructive open pit mining. TransCanada, an official supplier of the 2010 Olympics, runs the Keystone Pipeline Project that will bring large amounts of tar sands crude to U.S. markets.

### **B.C. “IPP projects,” General Electric (GE) and the 2010 Games**

While the B.C. government tries to frame private run-of-the-river projects in B.C. as “green,” there is nothing green about letting private corporations divert rivers and run roughshod over B.C.’s pristine wilderness. Opposed by a wide-ranging coalition of organizations and community members, concerns with these projects include the lack of recognizing the cumulative impacts of multiple projects on B.C.’s rivers and streams; no effective engagement with affected communities and First Nations; significant concerns with environmental impacts; B.C. policy of reserving green energy projects for the private sector; little evidence of the need for additional power other than to help power new large, environmentally destructive projects in the province, and for private exports.

The proposed Bute Inlet project, if it moves forward, would be the single largest private power project in Canada and would include a staggering 17 dammed creeks, 265 km of roads, 428 km of power lines, 100 bridges and 45,000 hectares of land granted. The project is facing significant opposition and GE’s image – GE will have a 60 per cent controlling interest – has taken a beating as a result. Sponsoring the Olympics is a prime opportunity for GE to polish its image – don’t be fooled.

**Can an event as large as the 2010 Games ever be “green”?**  
*“Perhaps it’s time to consider a fixed site for the Olympics and to encourage spectators to stay at home and watch international events on the telly.”*

- George Monbiot, author of  
“Heat: How to stop the planet from burning”

With carbon emissions and environmental destruction associated with the construction, waste and travel for Olympic Games repeated every four years in a new venue, the Games leave a significant environmental footprint.

- As reported by The Canadian Press, the 2010 Games will use and produce 110,000 tons of carbon emissions in addition to 190,000 tons of “indirect emissions.”
- While VANOC has announced a sponsorship deal to offset direct emissions, it is not addressing the 190,000 tons of indirect emissions, such as those associated with spectator travel.
- While there was a target of diverting all extra waste from the Games away from landfills, this has proved impossible. The target has been lowered to 85 per cent of the waste – will it be lowered again?

There is no doubt that the Olympics and the ideals of peace, sports and goodwill that they stand for, is something Canadians support. But a time of economic crisis when federal, provincial and municipal governments should focus on public projects that create a lasting positive social and economic foundation, the 2010 Games appear set to leave a legacy of social and environmental devastation and massive debt that will hobble our ability to make positive change and respond to the serious challenges facing communities across the province and the country. Corporations attempting to “greenwash” their corporate image through the Games should be held accountable – don’t be fooled by their “green sheen.”

The Olympics should stand for more.

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