

You're all hypocrites: Why it's a colossal cop-out to keep blaming Canada's sky high emissions on Alberta

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The Norwegian Bliss, which is powered by diesel, makes its way towards Ogden Point in Victoria on June 1, 2018 Chad Hipolito/Canadian Press

This week, the city of Victoria, B.C. announced plans to launch a class action lawsuit against the oil and gas sector. The idea is to tally up the various damages done to the city by climate change and send the bill to the likes of Suncor or CNRL.

It's the latest salvo of a movement that seeks to singularly blame the oil industry for climate change while conveniently ignoring the millions of daily consumer choices, often made by activists themselves, that contribute to Canada's fossil fuel addiction.

Below, a quick primer on how some of Canada's most anti-oil, anti-pipeline corners seem to have no problem burning oceans of oil when it's for stuff they like.

Victoria is Canada's busiest cruise ship port of call

At the same time that they're itemizing damages they can expense to ExxonMobil, Victoria is aggressively trying to attract more cruise ships. Mayor Lisa Helps, in fact, has championed a campaign that would make Victoria a home port for vessels. "It's a great opportunity not only from the room nights from a tourism perspective but also for the spinoffs it would generate for the local economy," she told local CBC. Tourism is very important to the B.C. capital, and a lot of that is indeed sustained by the estimated \$130 million brought in by the city's more than 200 cruise ship visits per year. But it all comes at the cost of enormous, heavy-oil-powered pleasure vessels idling just out of sight. The size and efficiency of cruise ships vary, but an analysis by the Global Sustainable Tourism Dashboard estimated that the average cruise ship passenger is racking up a carbon bill of 0.82 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent; roughly the same as a trans-Atlantic flight. The European Committee on Transport and Tourism, meanwhile, has estimated that a cruise ship passenger does about 36 cents of environmental damage for every kilometre they travel. It's essentially a marine equivalent of Victoria's economy being dependent on a sprawling parking lot filled with constantly idling RVs. Oh, and Victoria also just opened a dedicated marina for mega-yachts.

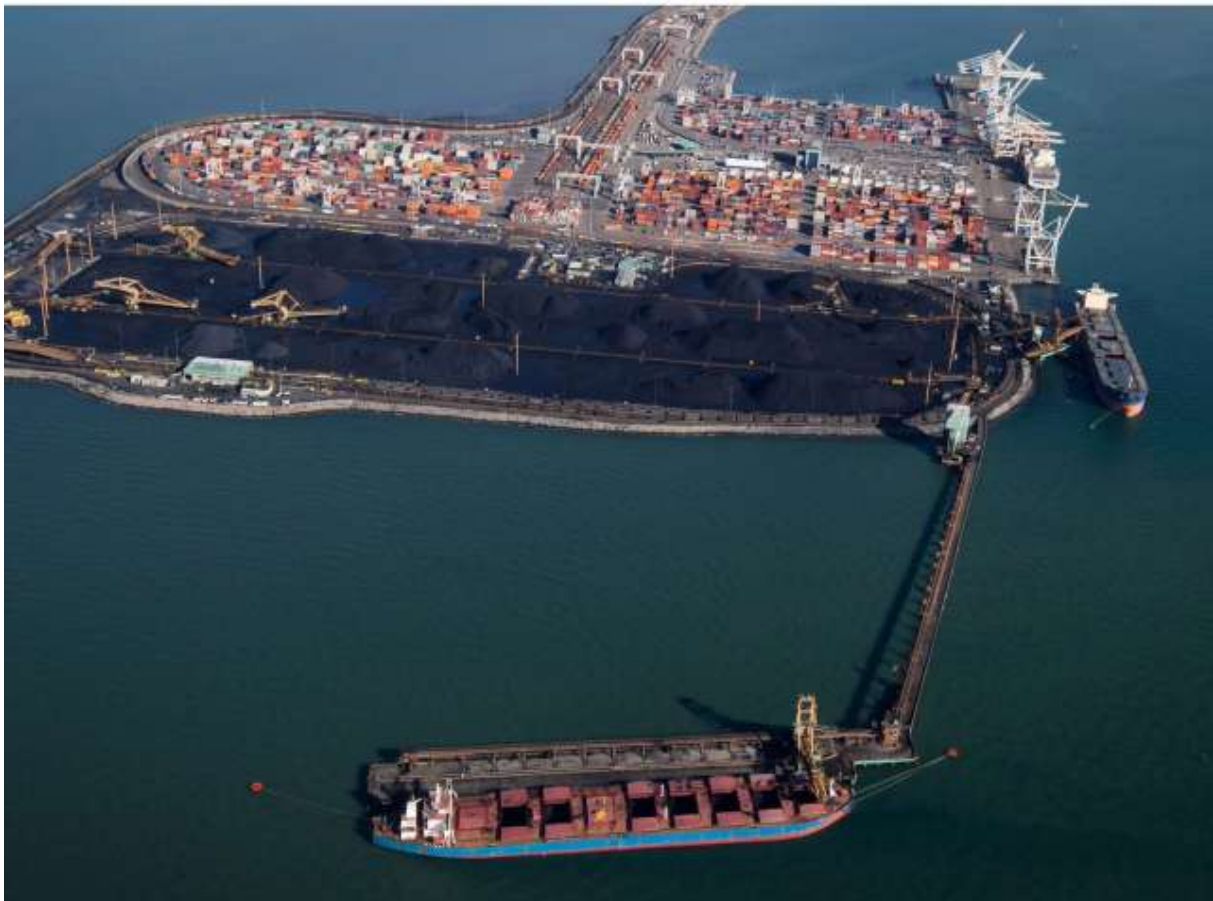


Concept image of the Victoria International Marina, a new Victoria destination for mega-yachts. Victoria International Marina

Vancouver is North America's largest exporter of coal

Anybody boarding a B.C. Ferries vessel from the Lower Mainland to Vancouver Island will pass directly by Westshore Terminals, the ranking title-holder as the largest single coal export facility in North America. In 2017, the port moved 29 million tonnes of coal, more than the combined coal exports of the entire U.S. West Coast. Coal is actually B.C.'s main export commodity, with \$3.32 billion worth of the stuff pulled out of the province in 2016. In

the hierarchy of dirty fuels, coal is the easy victor. One of the main reasons Ontario has been able to bring down its emissions in recent years, in fact, is simply because it swapped out its coal power plants for natural gas ones. A lot of this coal is for steel production, although an increasing share in recent years has “thermal coal” used for electricity production. Regardless, it all eventually gets sent up a smokestack somewhere in Asia. Per year, the coal sent out of Westshore Terminals represents a carbon dioxide footprint larger than B.C. as a whole. The lifecycle carbon dioxide emissions of a single year’s worth of Westshore coal exports is about 99.8 million tonnes. In all of 2014, the 4.7 million people in B.C. managed to emit only 64.5 million tonnes.



Ships are loaded with coal at Westshore Terminals in Delta, B.C., on Wednesday February 19, 2014. The terminal is North America's largest single coal export facility. The Canadian Press

Everybody (except Alberta) is emitting more carbon than they assume

Alberta is indeed responsible for a wildly disproportionate share of Canadian greenhouse gas emissions. In per capita terms, Albertans have a carbon footprint of 67 tonnes per year, compared to only 13 tonnes for the average Ontarian and 10 tonnes for the average Quebecer. This is largely because of oil and gas production. Running giant facilities in Northern Alberta that remove bitumen from sand require an awful lot of emissions, which all gets added to the Alberta total. However, it's somewhat unfair to slap all the oil sands

emissions on Alberta considering that most of the petroleum they're producing is getting used somewhere else. A unique analysis by the University of Calgary recently recalculated provincial emissions so that provinces were placed on the hook for the emissions that it had taken to produce their gasoline for them. If, say, B.C. consumed 10 per cent of Alberta's oil production, they were credited for 10 per cent of Alberta's oil production emissions. Under this model, Alberta's per-capita emissions drop to 39.5 tonnes while Ontario's rises to 17.6 tonnes and Quebec's to 15 tonnes. Why are Alberta's per capita emissions still incredibly high even when oil sands emissions are downloaded to other provinces? Coal-powered electricity is a major reason, although it is scheduled to be phased out by 2030. Albertans also have bigger cars, bigger homes, bigger malls, more construction and colder weather.



Keeping World Waterpark constantly heated to 31 degrees is undoubtedly pretty hard on the gas bill. City of Edmonton

Canadians (and Quebecers) are driving more and bigger cars

The good news is that car engines are getting more efficient. The bad news is that the vehicles they're carrying are getting heavier and Canadians are buying more of them. A mere 10 years ago, heavier vehicles such as trucks, vans or SUVs represented only 45 per cent of Canadian private vehicle sales. By 2017, that had risen to 69 per cent. Canadians are also buying more cars, with the rate of vehicle ownership rising from 70 per cent to 88 per

cent in only the last 20 years. “Canadians are embracing vehicle ownership faster than any other nation that we know of,” auto sales analyst Dennis DesRosier said in a 2018 post for the Canadian Fuels Association. This trend is even true in Quebec, the most consistent political opponent of new Alberta oil infrastructure. Between 1990 and 2013, sales of “light passenger trucks” in La Belle Province rose by 195 per cent, according to a report by HEC Montreal. Overall, Quebecers were increasingly favouring “heavy vehicles that use more fuel, produce more emissions and are difficult to electrify,” found the report. This relentless push towards larger vehicles has helped to boost Quebec’s gasoline demand by 13 per cent since 2013. Speaking of Quebec, at the same time its government was bad-mouthing the Energy East pipeline, they ponied up \$350 million to build a cement plant that now ranks as the single most high-emission facility in the province.



A particularly obnoxious Hummer H2, currently for sale on Montreal Kijiji. [Kijiji.ca](https://www.kijiji.ca)

Whistler’s economy runs on car and plane trips

In November, Whistler mayor Jack Crompton wrote letters to more than 20 oil companies officially asking them for money. Specifically, to pay their “fair share” of the costs of climate change, such as revenue losses due to shorter ski seasons. But Whistler is far from a model of carbon neutrality. The municipality hosts more than three million visitors per year, a rate that has risen by more than 40 per cent since the 2010 Olympics. Naturally, getting all these

extra visitors to a remote mountain community comes at an epic cost in fuel. More than 22,000 cars travel the Sea to Sky Highway each day, and Whistler actively promotes itself to international visitors, all of whom must presumably get there by jet aircraft. Whistler has one of the country's highest rates of non-resident property ownership, with 15.5 per cent of their residential property owned by people who must travel vast distances to occupy it. Whistler is also a world centre for heli-skiing, easily one of the more carbon-intensive leisure activities in existence. As Whistler's official tourism literature has boasted, 90 per cent of the world's heli-skiing happens in British Columbia.



That helicopter's burning through at least 300 litres of fuel per hour. Tourism Whistler

Canadian Amazon orders are rising precipitously

Just after Christmas, Amazon boasted that they had sold and shipped more items over the holiday season than ever before. In Canada alone, the rate of packages ordered with “free one-day shipping” jumped more than 100 per cent. It's hard to quantify Amazon's effect on the climate, largely because the company refuses to publish a sustainability report or disclose data on their carbon emissions. But given the small orders, the heavy use of air freight, the larger-than-average size of delivery vehicles and the sometimes-obscene quantities of packaging, it's safe to assume that an Amazon enthusiast is probably a bit harder on the climate than the shopper making a weekly trip to the mall. According to U.S. data, more than one quarter of the country's transportation emissions are from “medium and heavy-duty trucks,” the precise kind of vehicle that is increasingly being dispatched into residential neighbourhoods to deliver Amazon packages. Meanwhile, a lot of those products have hidden carbon footprints all their own. The manufacturing of an average iPhone X

emits about 60 kg of greenhouse gases; the rough equivalent of burning a water cooler jug filled with gasoline. But those emissions all happened in China, so they aren't counted towards the Canadian total.



A steel plant in Inner Mongolia, China. Kevin Frayer/Getty Images

Even in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, most commutes are by car

Downtown Toronto can proudly boast Canada's lowest-emission neighbourhoods. Walkable communities, ample transit and it's all powered by clean electricity from Pickering Nuclear Generating Plant. But this wonderfully green urban existence is also one of Canada's most expensive. For most everyone else, an affordable life in Toronto is probably going to require a lot of time in a car. Of Toronto commuters, 57.5 per cent still drive to work. This is the lowest rate of car commuters in Canada, but it's still not all that different from Calgary's rate of 68 per cent. Meanwhile, with the average Toronto commuter spending 47 hours a year stuck in congestion, it's reasonable to assume that many of those car commuters are spending more time on the road than anyone else in the country. Auto-dependent suburbs are one of the fastest growing segments of Canadian cities. According to research out of Queen's University, only 14 per cent of residents in major Canadian cities live in an "active core neighbourhood." From 2006 to 2016, an incredible 85 per cent of population growth in Canadian cities happened in auto-dependent suburbs. The housing affordability crisis hasn't

made this problem any better. It's also exacerbated by urbanites who actively shut out development in core neighbourhoods, pushing new builds to the car-dependent suburbs. When Cabbagetown can't even tolerate a new daycare in its midst, there is a carbon price to be paid.



A typical scene of fossil-fuel-powered congestion outside Montreal. John Kenney/The Gazette

More and more Canadians are flying

By far the number one way that a Canadian can send their carbon footprint soaring is by flying. A single roundtrip flight in economy class from Vancouver to Toronto adds an incredible 500 kilograms of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; the equivalent of burning a large rain barrel filled with gasoline. That single flight, in fact, spews more carbon dioxide into the air than the average Ghanaian can manage in an entire year. Thanks in part to the rise of low-cost airlines such as Swoop or Flair Air, more and more Canadians than ever before are jetting off to Mexico, Las Vegas or Nunavut, where a booming tourist trade is allowing visitors to witness a melting Arctic firsthand. From 2013 to 2017, the number of passengers processed through Canadian airports rose from 123.9 million to 149.6 million – a rise of more than 20 per cent. One of the only major airports that didn't see a precipitous

rise in traffic, in fact, is right in the middle of oil country: Edmonton only added an extra 68,000 passengers during that period, compared to an extra 5.8 million moved through Vancouver International Airport.



A plane comes in to land at Vancouver International Airport. Since the 2010 Olympics, air traffic moving through YVR has surged. Gerry Kahrmann / Postmedia File

Swimming pools full of diesel are burned daily to sustain your hippie island

Saanich Gulf Islands, the riding of Green Party leader Elizabeth May, contains five ferry-dependent island communities. Salt Spring Island alone has three terminals managing roughly 20 ferry arrivals per day. With only 10,000 inhabitants, this works out to an annual average of one ferry trip for every two Salt Springers. And a ferry puts even the most obnoxious Hummer to shame for fuel consumption. Salish Orca, one of the newest and most efficient vessels serving Salt Spring Island, still weighs 8,728 tonnes even before it's packed with 140 cars. Bowen Island, just outside Vancouver, is suspected of having one of Canada's largest carbon footprints due largely to its high number of daily ferry commuters. And with B.C. Ferries ridership higher than ever, the Salish Sea is set to feature even more ferries. Granted, B.C. Ferries has been working hard to reduce its fuel consumption. The fleet is also being converted to liquid natural gas, which will reduce emissions by up to 25 per cent. Regardless, in 2017 alone, B.C.'s island and coastal communities required a climate

tithe of 116.4 million litres of diesel. For context, the Burnaby Refinery (the only refinery in the Lower Mainland) cranks out about eight million litres of fuel per day. At that rate, it would need to work for two weeks straight just to provide a year's worth of fuel for B.C.'s ferry fleet.



The Queen of Capilano en route to Bowen Island. Postmedia File

Basically every anti-oil sands activist uses eye-watering quantities of fossil fuels

If someone has ever been introduced to a crowd as a “climate activist,” chances are strangely good that they consume fossil fuels at an infinitely higher rate than the average Westerner. Neil Young has a weakness for high-polluting vintage cars. David Suzuki pays to offset his personal emissions as a frequent flier, but isn't as keen on reducing them. Al Gore made \$70 million by selling Current TV to Qatar, a country whose GDP comes almost exclusively from fossil fuels. A common activist response to these kinds of criticisms is that they are merely victims to malevolent forces who have built a world dependent on fossil fuels. “Corrupt subsidies, unjustified wars and corrupt legislation ... have all made it impossible to do anything other than what oil companies tell us to do,” reads a 2018 blog post by the environmental group 350Vancouver. It is indeed impossible to live on the 21st century planet earth without unwittingly participating in the carbon economy in some way, but chances are good that Shell didn't force actor and climate change activist Leonardo

DiCaprio to rent the world's fifth largest yacht in order to watch the World Cup.

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