

Study Exposes Climate Claims by Big Oil as Corporate Propaganda



While continuing to fuel the climate emergency over the past decade, oil and gas majors relied on misleading messages rather than actually taking action to transition to clean energy, according to research released Wednesday.

The peer-reviewed study, published in the journal *PLOS One*, focused on two American companies, Chevron and ExxonMobil, as well as two European ones, BP and Shell—the four majors also at the center of an ongoing investigation by a U.S. House panel.

Three researchers at a pair of Japanese universities reviewed data from 2009 to 2020, examining the firms' keyword use in annual reports; business strategies; and production, expenditures, and earnings for fossil fuels along with investments in clean energy.

"We found a strong increase in discourse related to 'climate,' 'low-carbon,' and 'transition,' especially by BP and Shell," the paper states. "Similarly, we observed increasing tendencies toward strategies related to decarbonization and clean energy. But these are dominated by pledges rather than concrete actions."

"Moreover, the financial analysis reveals a continuing business model dependence on fossil fuels along with insignificant and opaque spending on clean energy," the study adds. "We thus conclude that the transition to clean energy business models is not occurring, since the magnitude of investments and actions does not match discourse."

The document emphasizes that "until actions and investment behavior are brought into alignment with discourse, accusations of greenwashing appear well-founded."

"This study confirms what observers have always known about Big Oil's climate pledges: They're all hot air," Wiles noted. "Oil and gas companies talk like they care about the climate, but they keep drilling and polluting with complete disregard for the damage they cause."

"The oil and gas industry's deception has now landed these companies in front of Congress and in courtrooms across the country," he said. "Polluters cannot and should not be trusted to help solve the very climate crisis they knowingly caused."

The recent House hearing organized by the panel's chair, Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.), and Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Calif.), a subcommittee leader—featured multiple expert witnesses after board members at BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, and Shell refused to testify.

Maloney and Khanna are planning another hearing for March 8. The chair, who already subpoenaed the companies after an October hearing, said the oil majors should consider next month's event "their last chance to cooperate" and "if their board members refuse to appear, they should expect further action" from the committee.

October's hearing featured hours of testimony from the firms' CEOs—who, as Wiles put it, "not only refused to accept responsibility for lying about the catastrophic effects of their fossil fuels—they refused to stop efforts to spread disinformation and oppose climate action."