

US Local Governments Sue Fossil Fuel Companies for Climate Change Damages

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Category : Science/Environment

Unlocking Word Meanings

Read the following words/expressions found in today’s article.

- 1. **fossil fuel** / ‘fɒs əl ‘fyu əl / (n) – fuel such as oil, gas, or coal formed underground from ancient plant and animal remains
Example: Some Middle Eastern countries have rich deposits of **fossil fuels**.
- 2. **hold (someone/something) accountable** / hoʊld ə ‘kaʊn tə bəl / (idiom) – to believe that someone is responsible for something
Example: The residents **hold** the chemical factory **accountable** for water pollution in their area.
- 3. **catastrophe** / kə ‘tæs trə fi / (n) – a disastrous event
Example: Natural **catastrophes** are difficult to prevent.
- 4. **hold water** / hoʊld ‘wɔ tə, ‘wɒt ə / (idiom) – to be reasonable and valid
Example: I am confident that our case will **hold water** because I have enough evidence.
- 5. **trace** / treɪs / (v) – to find out the cause or origin of something
Example: Experts **traced** the cause of the oil spill to a leak in the pipes.

Article

Read the text below.

Local governments in the United States are filing lawsuits against **fossil fuel** companies for aggravating climate change.

New York, San Francisco, and Oakland are among the nine US cities and counties that have sued Big Oil, a group of fossil fuel companies that include BP, Exxon Mobil, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, and Royal Dutch Shell. The local governments are **holding these companies accountable** for greatly contributing to climate change, which caused extreme weather conditions like floods, wildfires, landslides, and other similar **catastrophes**.

A report published in the *Washington Journal of Environmental Law and Policy* revealed that in 2010, Exxon Mobil alone was accountable for global climate change damages that amounted to \$19.6 billion. The company’s annual contribution to costs and damages related to climate change is also forecasted to reach \$138.6 billion by 2030.

Although no climate lawsuit has reached the trial stage, Vic Sher—a partner at the law firm Sher Edling LLP—is confident that the local governments’ cases will **hold water**. According to Sher, scientific data can now **trace** about two-thirds of the greenhouse gas emissions since the Industrial Revolution back to fossil fuel companies. Greenhouse gases cause greenhouse effect or the situation wherein the atmosphere traps heat radiation from the sun. Greenhouse effect, in turn, leads to climate change.

Aside from scientific data, the recent lawsuits will also present evidence that the companies did not take action despite knowing that fossil fuels cause climate change. Leaked internal documents show that the companies deliberately misled the public by promoting their products as environment-friendly in order to protect their business.

Viewpoint Discussion

Enjoy a discussion with your tutor.

Discussion A

- Do you agree that the local governments should hold fossil fuel companies accountable for climate change? Explain.

- [illegible]

[illegible]

- [illegible]

- [illegible]

[illegible][illegible]