



# LEADERS FOR CLIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY

# MESSAGING GUIDE

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## TALKING POINTS

***We need to hold corporate polluters accountable for causing and lying about climate change.***

Oil and gas companies have known for decades that their products cause climate change, but they lied to the American people to protect their profits. They must be held accountable.

(“They knew, they lied, they need to pay/they need to be held accountable.”)

***They Knew***

- Internal documents show that oil and gas executives knew their products would cause dangerous climate change as early as 1968.
- Scientists at ExxonMobil and other major oil and gas companies warned executives that unabated use of fossil fuels could lead to “potentially catastrophic” results.

***They Lied***

- Rather than share their internal knowledge with the world and help to lead the clean energy transition, oil and gas giants launched what a growing number of attorneys general have described as a “campaign of deception” to spread climate denial and mislead the public, media, and policymakers in order to block climate action and protect their bottom line.
- Big Oil copied Big Tobacco’s playbook: they used ads, front groups and scientists-for-hire to lie to the public about the harms they knew their products would cause.

***Our communities are paying the price for the fossil fuel industry’s actions.***

- Our communities are footing multibillion dollar bills to protect our homes, families, jobs, economies, infrastructure, and public health from extreme temperatures, unprecedented wildfires, rising seas, more frequent and destructive storms, devastating flooding, and more.
- These climate costs often fall hardest on our low-income communities, communities of color, and other environmental justice communities that have fewer resources to combat climate impacts.

***Polluters should pay their fair share so our taxpayers aren’t stuck footing the entire bill.***

- The fossil fuel industry has made trillions of dollars from the products that cause climate change, but is sticking our communities with the bill to clean up their mess.
  - The fossil fuel industry protected its own assets from climate change, but lied to the public and left the rest of us to fend for ourselves.



- Nearly 2/3 of all industrial emissions can be traced back to just 90 individual companies. In other words, it's just a handful of companies, like ExxonMobil, BP, and Chevron, who are responsible for the vast majority of climate change-causing pollution.
- It's simple: If you make a mess, you should pay to clean it up.

***We must protect access to the courts, so that when companies sell products they know will harm the public, they can be held accountable.***

- A growing number of states and municipalities are turning to the courts to hold the fossil fuel industry accountable for lying about climate change and to make them pay its fair share of the damage.
- Fossil fuel companies are terrified of having to answer for their deception in court, and they are using their considerable resources to fight these cases at every stage.
  - At the same time, industry-backed groups are pushing to limit communities' ability to even access the courts at all.
- Thankfully, lower courts have largely ruled against the industry, and the climate liability cases are gradually moving forward.
- The people deserve their day in court.
- Courts have always been the place to hold accountable companies that lie to the public about the harms caused by their products (e.g. tobacco, opioids, asbestos, lead paint, PFAS).

## **Big Oil's Deception – In Their Own Words**

- “Did we aggressively fight against some of the science? Yes. Did we join some of these shadow groups to work against some of the early efforts? Yes that's true ... We were looking out for our investments, we were looking out for shareholders.” - Senior federal ExxonMobil lobbyist Keith McCoy, caught on tape in 2021.
- The goals of the fossil fuel industry's deception campaign were described by the American Petroleum Institute in a 1998 memo: “Victory will be achieved when average citizens understand uncertainties in climate science...”
- “Exxon was publicly promoting views that its own scientists knew were wrong. This was immoral and has greatly set back efforts to address climate change.” - Former Exxon scientific consultant Martin Hoffert, in 2019 congressional testimony.



# Messaging Do's and Don'ts

Do	Don't
<p>Talk about the fossil fuel industry's role in the climate crisis and the need to hold fossil fuel companies accountable.</p>	<p>Equate holding the fossil fuel industry accountable with solving the climate crisis. <i>(Note: they are separate but both important: we need climate solutions AND accountability).</i></p>
<p>Discuss specific examples about how climate change is creating expensive costs in your community – and how the fossil fuel industry is responsible for those costs.</p>	<p>Say we are all equally to blame for climate change and equally responsible for solutions.</p>
<p>Blame the fossil fuel industry for lying to your constituents about climate change.</p>	<p>Blame individual consumers for using the only energy options available to them (oil and gas).</p>
<p>Compare Big Oil to Big Tobacco and other industries that lied about harmful products.</p>	<p>Make excuses for the fossil fuel industry's pollution and deception.</p>



## Common Opposition Arguments and Suggested Responses

What the Industry Says	How to Respond
<p>"We are all equally responsible for climate change. Consumers need to do their part to combat climate change."</p>	<p>We are not all equally responsible. A small number of fossil fuel companies are responsible for the vast majority of emissions.</p> <p>The industry's deception and obstruction made it difficult, if not impossible, for most people to access alternative energy sources.</p> <p>The entire notion of the "personal carbon footprint" was developed by BP to shift blame to consumers.</p>
<p>"Climate policy is not an issue for the courts.</p> <p>These cases are an attempt to push an agenda through the courts instead of Congress."</p>	<p>Climate accountability lawsuits are not about climate policy or "solving" climate change. They are about holding bad actors accountable for their lying and misconduct.</p> <p>Creating climate policy is still the job of Congress. But deciding who has violated state law and who should pay damages is the role of state courts.</p>
<p>"Instead of blaming energy manufacturers, lawmakers should work with the industry on innovative solutions to combat climate change."</p>	<p>The fossil fuel industry has fought climate solutions for decades, and even got caught on tape admitting to it. We wouldn't invite tobacco executives to negotiate health care policy, and we shouldn't invite oil executives to have a seat at the table when it comes to climate solutions.</p>