

Exxon knew

Exxon knew climate change was happening because of human greenhouse gas emissions...

- “In the first place, there is general scientific agreement that the most likely manner in which mankind is influencing the global climate is through carbon dioxide release from the burning of fossil fuels.” [Senior Exxon scientist James Black presented in 1977]
- “Present thinking holds that man has a time window of five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical.” [The same person in 1978, reporting on their own data.]
- Global warming “would require major reductions in fossil fuel combustion... [unless that happened] there are some potentially catastrophic events that must be considered.... Once the effects are measurable, they might not be reversible.” [An internal Exxon report marked not to be distributed]
- “Over the past several years, a clear scientific consensus has emerged. There is unanimous agreement in the scientific community that a temperature increase of [2-3 degrees C] would bring about significant changes in the earth’s climate, including rainfall distribution and alterations in the biosphere.” [Exxon’s 1982 internal scientific model]

But then Exxon made a sharp turn into the doubt industry. It began firing its own scientists. It turned its back on its own research and data:

- “Currently, the scientific evidence is inconclusive as to whether human activities are having a significant effect on the global climate.” [Same CEO, 1996]
- “It is highly unlikely that the temperature in the middle of the next century will be significantly affected whether policies are enacted now or 20 years from now.” [CEO Lee Raymond in 1997]
- Referring to its ad campaign to cast doubt on the Kyoto treaty — the first international agreement to try to reign in carbon emissions — “Victory will be achieved when average citizens ‘understand’ (recognize) uncertainties in climate science.” [Exxon’s internal memo, 1998]

The CEO then slashed funding by over 80% for their scientific research on carbon impacts on the planet. Exxon kept reaping huge profits. Meanwhile, they put the responsibility back onto individuals:

- “What can consumers do to address the risks of climate change? Here are some simple steps to consider: Be smart about electricity use. Heat and cool your home efficiently. Improve your gas mileage. Check your home's greenhouse gas emissions [with a carbon footprint calculator].” [Exxon ad]

But Exxon *knows* what needs to be done. The solutions are less fossil fuels:

- An Exxon employee researching ways to offset Exxon’s carbon emissions said they knew steps to take: “It was that greenhouse gas buildup could pose a threat to our business. You didn’t want climate change caused by oil and gas. So the responsible thing to do was offset any greenhouse gases you were putting into the atmosphere.” [Exxon employee]
- “Data confirm that greenhouse gas are increasing in the atmosphere. Fossil fuels contribute most of the CO2.... Arguments that we can’t tolerate delay and must act now can lead to irreversible and costly draconian steps.” [Duane LeVine, Exxon’s manager of science and strategy development, 1989]

And here is where we are:

Exxon spent 0.2% on low-carbon like wind and solar. Its emissions throughout its chain (known as Scope 3 emissions) alone are more than all of Canada.”

<https://www.clientearth.org/projects/the-greenwashing-files/exxonmobil/>