

Environmental Priorities for Election 2021

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

August 2021



environmental
defence

As the country heads towards an election, it has never been clearer to Canadians that the climate crisis is at our doorstep. In fact, climate change remains the single largest threat to our economy and to public health. The global plastic pollution crisis has not dissipated either. And our business-as-usual approach allows thousands of toxic chemicals to be released into our environment and consumer products, which is making us sicker and even less resilient to viral epidemics.

As political parties prepare and publish their election platforms, our experts have prepared a priority list the environmental policies that will be most effective at addressing the climate crisis, plastic pollution, and other environmental concerns.

Indicators of a strong environmental plan include:

- Climate targets that align with climate science. Canada must do our fair share to prevent the most catastrophic impacts of climate change by ensuring that global warming stays as close to 1.5°C as possible - which in Canada means reducing CO₂ emissions by at least 60% below 2005 levels by 2030 across the country. Because Canada has created an outsized amount of emissions over the last century, Ottawa also must invest \$5.2 billion annually in emissions reductions in developing countries.¹
- No more new oil, gas and coal projects. Canada is still planning to produce more oil and gas than is consistent with a climate-safe future,^{2,3} even after the International Energy Agency has made it clear that no new fossil fuel projects can safely proceed. A credible climate plan must clearly state that it will not approve any new oil, gas and coal projects and cancel projects currently under construction. It must also include a commitment to wind down existing production of oil and gas over the next two decades.
- An end to fossil fuel subsidies. Canada is still providing billions of dollars of government money to the oil and gas industry each year.⁴ A credible climate plan must include a concrete plan to end all subsidies and public financial support for oil and gas immediately.
- A way to make polluters pay. Polluters must also be held accountable for the harm they cause to the land, water and climate, and especially for their disproportionate harm to communities of color and low-income communities.⁵ Recent reporting makes it

¹ <https://climateactionnetwork.ca/2019/12/02/canadas-fair-share-towards-limiting-global-warming-to-1-5c/>

² <https://cascadeinstitute.org/technical-paper/correcting-canadas-one-eye-shut-climate-policy/>

³ <https://productiongap.org/2019report/>

⁴ <https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/federal-fossil-fuel-subsidies-2020/>

⁵ <https://www.thestar.com/news/atkinsonseries/2015/08/28/first-nations-bear-the-risks-of-oilsands-development.html>

clear that companies have spent years covering up the true cost of clean up, and will leave the costs to the public unless Canada has strong accountability mechanisms.⁶

- A ramp up of renewables and energy efficiency. The technological and logistical solutions to transition our energy systems away from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy already exist.⁷ By starting now, we can ensure we are also creating good, safe jobs across the country.⁸ The transition requires large investments in electricity infrastructure, renewable energy, electric transportation, public transit and energy efficiency projects like home and business energy retrofits and more.
- A commitment to ensuring that the transition to a low carbon economy is just and equitable. This includes developing and implementing a transition plan to phase out fossil fuels, designed by and for workers and communities whose livelihoods will be disrupted by the transition.⁹ It also must involve those, including Indigenous Peoples and frontline communities, who have been disproportionately harmed by the fossil fuel-based economy.
- A commitment to protect the Great Lakes and decommissioning Line 5. Numerous safety violations have occurred with this pipeline which has already spilled at least 4.5 million liters of oil into the surrounding lands and waters. This pipeline is an ongoing threat to the Great Lakes basin as long as it remains in operation. The decommissioning of old pipelines is also necessary to address the urgent need to rapidly reduce carbon emissions on the path to net-zero by 2050.¹⁰
- A ban on the export of thermal coal from Canada. Thermal coal is the most harmful fossil fuel and its mining, transportation, and combustion have severe impacts on the environment and human health. Though Canada has taken steps to end the use of thermal coal domestically, we continue to export the fossil fuel to be burned overseas – including millions of tons of US coal that is exported from Canadian ports.
- A ban on single-use plastics. A commitment to ban single-use plastic items, starting within six months, and to require new plastic products to include a significant amount of recycled material.
- A phase-out of all non-recyclable plastics by 2030. A commitment to require all new plastic products and packaging manufactured and sold in Canada to be mechanically recyclable in an environmentally safe manner.
- A shift to reuse and refill packaging. Immediate support for reusable and refillable packaging and containers across Canada through regulatory and financial measures to ensure all Canadians have access to reuse and refill for at least 30 per cent of food, beverage and personal care packaging by 2030.

⁶ <https://www.aldpcoalition.com/thebigcleanup>

⁷ <https://www.irena.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2021/Jun/IRENAs-World-Energy-Transitions-Outlook-Re-Writes-Energy-Narrative-for-a-Net-Zero-World>

⁸ <https://cleanenergycanada.org/report/the-new-reality/>

⁹ <https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/steady-path-transition-fossilfuel-jobs/>

¹⁰ <https://environmentaldefence.ca/2021/08/04/five-reasons-why-its-time-to-shut-down-the-aging-line-5-pipeline-and-protect-the-great-lakes/>

Ineffective environmental policies:

Not all of the policies that have been recently entered the public conversation will yield productive results. Some are actively ineffective or harmful.

This includes plans that:

- Prop up false solutions like ‘blue’ hydrogen, carbon offsets, and carbon capture technologies that will lock us into more extraction of fossil fuels. *These technologies don’t actually reduce emissions and aren’t economically viable.*^{11, 12}
- Promise to achieve net-zero emissions, but foresee an expansion--or even a continued reliance--on fossil fuel production. *We can’t achieve net-zero emissions while expanding Canada’s largest source of emissions - the oil and gas sector.*
- Do not take responsibility for the full scope of Canada’s emissions, including emissions that result from Canada exporting fossil fuels overseas.¹³ *Canada has created an outsized amount of global carbon pollution over the last century- we need to do our share to reduce it.*
- Promote “advanced” or “chemical” recycling of plastic, which will only serve to allow increased production of virgin plastic from oil and gas. *Almost all “advanced” recycling turns plastic into fuel and perpetuates our reliance on fossil fuel extraction and refining while undermining efforts to stop climate change.*¹⁴
- Reject the listing of plastic as toxic under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and undermine associated efforts to regulate plastic and ban single-use items. *The plastics and petrochemical industries are seeking to avoid enforceable rules and regulation in favour of voluntary efforts, which are ineffective at reducing plastic production, consumption and pollution.*¹⁵

Given the urgency of the compounding ecological crises, all political parties should be prepared to address questions about how they will handle these critical issues during the next Parliament.

- Does your party commit to taking all possible actions to implement a just and fair phase-out of all fossil fuels?
- It has been over a decade since Canada first committed to ending fossil fuel subsidies. Yet in 2020, the Government of Canada [announced at least \\$18 billion](#) in subsidies and public financing for the oil and gas sector. Does your party commit to ending all subsidies, public finance and other fiscal supports for fossil fuels by 2022, including financial support provided through Export Development Canada?

¹¹ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ese3.956>

¹² https://environmentaldefence.ca/report/ccs_letter/

¹³ <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/07/27/opinion/canada-hidden-fossil-fuel-emissions-avoid-climate-catastrophe>

¹⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/environment-plastic-oil-recycling/>

¹⁵ <https://canadianchemistry.ca/blog/2021/05/12/statement-by-the-chemistry-industry-association-of-canada-on-canada-gazette-ii-order-regarding-plastic-manufactured-items/>

- Oil and gas lobby groups are propping up false solutions to the climate crisis like carbon capture and storage technologies. But these will lock in more production of oil and gas. Will your party commit to focusing on real solutions to the climate crisis, like energy efficiency and renewables, rather than these false solutions?
- Canada is the only G7 country whose emissions have grown over the past decade. The IPCC just issued a code red - we need to reduce our emissions now. Will your party cancel the TransMountain Pipeline expansion and Coastal Gaslink, support the closure of Enbridge Line 5, and stop approving new oil and gas projects?
- Will your party commit to holding big polluters accountable, for example by ensuring oil and gas companies are forced to pay for the costs of cleaning up the mess they've left behind like tailing ponds and old oil and gas wells?
- Will your party commit to immediately re-introducing and improving the bill to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to better protect Canada's environment and Canadians' health?
- Thermal coal is widely recognized as the most harmful fossil fuel and its mining, transportation, and combustion has severe impacts on the environment and human health. Despite commitments to end the use of thermal coal domestically, Canada continues to export both Canadian and American thermal coal to be burned for electricity overseas. What will you do to ensure Canada bans the export of thermal coal?
- Will your party commit to vigorously defending the listing of plastic as toxic under CEPA against the Big Plastic lawsuit and proceed as quickly as possible to ban single-use items such as checkout bags, stir sticks, cutlery, six-pack rings, takeout containers and straws?
- The plastics industry wants the government to fund experimental "advanced" recycling, which mostly involves trying to turn non-recyclable waste into fuel. This is simply a tactic to continue extracting and refining climate-damaging fossil fuels. Will you commit stopping funding that supports fossil fuel processing for plastics and focusing instead, through regulatory and financial incentives, on making reusable and refillable containers and packaging accessible to Canadians?

For further information, or to arrange an interview with one of our experts, please contact:

media@environmentaldefence.ca or 647.280.9521