

## Bush and Esso – number one global warming villains

When President Bush announced in March 2001 that the US would be pulling out of the Kyoto Treaty, the mark of the fossil fuel industry was all over his policy. One company stands out from the rest as having done more than any other to bring about Bush's climate climb-down. For the last 10 years Esso (ExxonMobil in the US) has been working consistently and systematically to derail any international action to tackle global warming. While Esso's opposition to Kyoto is no secret, it has also been engaged in a concerted effort to turn its opinion into policy, through the covert funding and support of industry lobbying organisations and climate-sceptic scientists.

As ExxonMobil's Vice President (HSE) - Frank Sprow - has admitted: *"Companies that produce and use fossil fuels, oil, coal and gas, have a vested interest in the outcome of the climate change debate."*<sup>1</sup> None more so than Esso, the world's most profitable company, with \$18 billion profits a year from oil, coal and gas and no investment in renewable forms of energy. Faced with the possibility of emissions limits of global warming gases, Esso seems prepared to stoop to any level to protect profit over planet.

It is unlikely that the full extent of Esso efforts to sabotage international action on climate change will ever be known, but some of their dirty tricks have been revealed.

## Esso's campaign to undermine action on global warming

Esso's opposition to international action on global warming is not passive. There is considerable evidence of a concerted, ongoing strategy to change the perception of the US public and policy makers about global warming. One of the clearest examples Esso's leading role in the planning of a \$7 million industry PR offensive by the American Petroleum Institute. The plan was aimed at re-injecting uncertainty into the US public's perception of climate science in the run up to the climate negotiations in Buenos Aires in November 1998.<sup>2</sup>

Part of the plan involved recruiting and training five "independent" scientists – *"new faces... without a long history of visibility in the climate debate"* to participate in media outreach. The API aimed to *"maximise the impact of scientific views consistent with ours, with Congress, the media and other key audiences"* and admitted shamelessly that it would target teachers and students, in order to *"begin to erect a barrier against further efforts to impose Kyoto-like measures in the future."*

## Undermining the science

Esso has also been funding some of the most visible and notorious "climate sceptics", whose work it can use to back up its anti-Kyoto lobbying<sup>3</sup> and to distort the debate. Whether or not money from the fossil fuel industry has corrupted the findings of scientists, these scientists have been given a voice and a platform of global reach to deliver their opinion to the public. Their level of

exposure, particularly in the media, and their influence on the debate has been completely out of proportion both to their contribution to the science and the extent to which they represent wider scientific opinion. Credible scientists have often been hired from one field to do PR work for the fossil fuel industry in another field, thereby parading opinion as scientific fact.

One of the most high profile sceptics in the climate change debate, **S. Fred Singer**, has recently denied receiving any oil company money in the 20 years that he has been consulting for the oil industry.<sup>4</sup> Yet Exxon's own documents<sup>5</sup> show that in 1998, the company gave a grant of \$10,000 to the Science and Environmental Policy Project (SEPP), of which Singer is the founding president, and another \$65,000 to the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, which promotes and supports Singer's work.<sup>6</sup>

### **Misusing Economics: Counting the costs of climate action**

As it becomes increasingly difficult to convince the public that global warming is a myth, Esso has begun to pedal scare stories on the costs of action. Urgent warnings are made of economic disaster, massive unemployment and loss of competitiveness, particularly in the US, if emissions reductions are accepted.

Despite the fact that developing countries emit only a fraction of global greenhouse gases, and the historical burden for emissions rests on the developed world, Esso continues to argue that developing countries should make the same binding agreements. However, Esso also lobbies these developing countries to reject any environmental obligations that might "strangle economic growth".<sup>7</sup> Calling on the US not to accept binding targets without developing countries and then calling on developing countries not to accept binding targets creates a political impasse.

### **Front Groups**

As well as carrying out its own lobbying at the climate talks or in the media, Esso has carried out much of its work to undermine the negotiations under the cover of industry lobby organisations.

Both Exxon and Mobil were on the board of the infamous Global Climate Coalition, the most outspoken and confrontational lobby group. The GCC set up in 1989 put enormous resources into waging multi-million dollar misinformation campaigns. Esso was the last company to leave the GCC when a large-scale defection of companies such as BP, Ford and Texaco who admitted that global warming needed action, meant the GCC decided to end corporate members.

Esso funds the American Petroleum Institute, which remains a member of the GCC. Esso's chief scientific advisor Brian Flannery is also a spokesperson for The International Chamber of Commerce, which was active at COP6. Esso is also a member directly or indirectly of the International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA), the US Business Round Table (BRT), the Global Climate Information Project (GCIP) and the US Council on International Business, all of which oppose and work against the Kyoto Protocol.

For more details and a chronological account of Esso's campaign against the Kyoto Protocol, see Greenpeace's report: 'Esso – a Decade of Dirty Tricks'.

## Bush's Rejection of the Kyoto Protocol

Esso's decade of dirty tricks came to a head this year. President Bush's views about the Kyoto Protocol became clear in March when he reneged on a campaign promise to cap carbon dioxide emissions from US power plants and, at the same time rejected the Kyoto treaty.

On 28 March, President Bush removed all doubt about who was setting the agenda in the White House by announcing that the US was pulling out of negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol. Bush was clearly paying back the fossil fuel companies who had done so much to get him elected. Esso, in particular gave more money to the Republican Party than any other oil company

However, in spite of Bush's attempts to kill off the Kyoto Protocol, on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2001 the 178 countries gathered at the climate negotiations in Bonn Germany took the long overdue step of agreeing the rules for implementing the treaty - without the USA. Thanks to Esso the US stands arrogantly outside of this agreement that the rest of the world wants and needs.

## Conclusion

Esso must bear significant responsibility for the refusal by the world's biggest polluter to sign up to the Kyoto protocol. As the world's biggest oil-company, Esso are also as The Economist has noted "the world's most powerful climate sceptic". The amount of influence Esso wields over President Bush should not be underestimated.

The Kyoto Protocol is only a step towards stabilising the world's climate. But it is a vital one. No country or company has the right to declare it dead and condemn us all to the nightmare of global warming.

**For more information please contact Greenpeace Press office:**

**Tel: 020 7865 8255**

**Web: <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk>**

<sup>1</sup> Speech to Institute for the Study of Earth and Man, Dallas, June 11 1998

<sup>2</sup> leaked memo to the New York Times, reprinted in *The Oil Industry and Climate Change*, Greenpeace International, 1998

<sup>3</sup> Ross Gelbspan, *ExxonMobil emerges as major funder of greenhouse sceptics*, March 2001, <http://www.heatisonline.org>

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post, letter to the editor, 12 Feb 2001

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.exxonmobil.com/contributions/public\\_info.html](http://www.exxonmobil.com/contributions/public_info.html)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.atlasusa.org/highlights/archives/1995/H1995-02-Environment.html>

<sup>7</sup> Lee Raymond, speech to the World Petroleum Congress, Beijing, Oct 1999