

Myth: The Science Is Uncertain

Tobacco companies still find scientists to say smoking doesn't cause cancer, but that doesn't mean it's true. When climate change first got international attention in 1988, governments established one of the most comprehensive scientific initiatives ever - the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). With hundreds of climate and ecosystem scientists, including most of the world's experts in these fields, the IPCC draws on all published research - research that has been subjected to wide peer review and confirmation. These scientists predict a dramatic increase in average global temperatures and destabilizing of the earth's climate if emissions continue to rise. And actual measurements of what is now happening in the environment closely match the predicted changes.

There is uncertainty about how climate will change in specific regions and how fast it might occur, but by the time we are certain of every aspect of the science it will be far too late to prevent ecological catastrophe. A few practicing scientists disagree with the IPCC's findings. The IPCC carefully investigates all of their challenges and, if warranted, adjusts its findings accordingly. However, few of the "science skeptics" quoted by anti-Kyoto advocates actually publish and defend their positions in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Reality The vast majority of the world's scientific experts agree that human activity is having a major influence on climate and tell us we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Myth: Doing nothing costs nothing

Leading climate and ecosystem scientists predict rising and costly impacts if climate change gets worse. We are already experiencing some climate change caused by human activities. How much will it cost? Talk to the farmers of western Canada, now facing a third straight year of record-breaking droughts. Ask forestry companies losing timber from record-breaking forest fires and insect damage, or insurance companies facing record-breaking payouts from extreme weather, or health care systems paying for growing numbers of victims from local air pollution. Calculating the price tag of failing to act on climate change is difficult, however insurance companies estimate that the worldwide costs of climate change caused by human activities could reach \$US300-billion a year by 2050. Scientists predict Canada will face bigger impacts from climate change than many other countries and the most affected industries such as forestry, agriculture, fishing, and tourism are vital to our economy.

Reality The costs of **not** acting to slow down climate change will outweigh any costs associated with implementing Kyoto, and beyond.

Myth: Why act? We only produce 3% of Global Emissions

At 3%, Canada is the ninth highest total emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the world. However, we have just 0.5% of the world's population and we have the third highest level of GHG emissions per person, just behind Australia and the U.S. In Alberta, emissions per person are three times higher than the Canadian average! Protecting climate means recognizing that we have a limited supply of space in the atmosphere for GHGs. If we use more than our fair share, then everyone else has less. Using so much more space than everyone else for free waste disposal already amounts to a huge subsidy by the rest of the world to run our economic engine. Our government can't expect to get an even bigger waste disposal subsidy in the future from other trading nations - especially as space in the atmosphere quickly becomes more valuable, and scarce.

By ratifying Kyoto, Canada will directly contribute to the protocol coming into force. Then the 26 other industrialized countries that have already ratified will be obliged to reduce their emissions. And then negotiations can begin with developing nations to establish their future

Reality Acting on our "little" 3% share makes a big difference to global action. That benefits our climate, our natural resources, and our economy.

Myth: Kyoto is flawed - India and China don't have to do anything!

Kyoto is a "protocol" attached to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In negotiating the 1992 treaty, all nations unanimously agreed that developed countries had to lead in reducing emissions. Why? Well, our economies released the vast majority of the gases now causing the problem. Even today, on a per person basis, India and China use a tiny fraction of the space we each use in the atmosphere. To develop their economies they clearly need some room to increase emissions. How can a country like Canada tell a country such as India with less than one tenth of our economic standard of living that, because we have already used all of the space in the atmosphere for dumping GHGs, they have to cap or reduce their emissions and can't use energy like we did to industrialize and fully develop?

As the first step covering the period before 2012, Kyoto was never intended to include developing nations. Once industrialized countries have ratified Kyoto and are showing results, countries like India and China will take on their own binding targets under future protocols coming into effect after 2012.

Reality Kyoto was designed by all countries to allow developing nations to narrow the huge gap between rich and poor - then they can help protect climate.

Myth: Kyoto spells economic disaster

Canada's economy is projected to grow by about 30% between 2000 and 2010. Using modelling developed jointly by federal and provincial government experts, economists predict that meeting Kyoto targets might trim this growth by 0.4% - so the economy might "only" grow by 29.5%. Opponents of Kyoto have not produced a single credible study showing a major economic impact from implementation.

Economic forecasts usually overestimate the impact of environmental regulations because they can't model something industry is very good at - innovation and new technology. Every time we face a major environmental problem and suggest cleaner standards, companies claim the economy will nose-dive. But look what actually happened when industry was forced to dramatically cut sulphur emissions to curb acid rain, get lead out of gasoline to stop poisoning children, or eliminate CFCs to protect the ozone layer. They developed cleaner technologies and the economy prospered. Environmental necessity is the mother of clean technology invention.

Reality Even the most unlikely, worst-case for implementing Kyoto only trims 2 percentage points off the 30% growth in the economy expected for Canada over the next decade.

Myth: Kyoto will cost workers their jobs

Opponents can't show that anyone will lose a job if we ratify Kyoto. Instead, they take national modelling results and place them totally out of context. Using models developed jointly by federal and provincial government experts, economists predict that Canada will create 1,320,000 new jobs between 2002 and 2010 without Kyoto compared with 1,260,000 with Kyoto. It is dishonest to "spin" this to imply that 60,000 workers will lose their existing jobs. However, a concern for jobs is legitimate. Over time, fewer jobs will be created in the dirtiest industries, and more will be created in the fields of new clean technologies, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Most of the organized labour movement is now on record as supporting Kyoto. The 150,000 member Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (including 35,000 members working in the conventional energy industry) recently endorsed Kyoto - with an important condition: establish a Just Transition Fund to support workers requiring re-location or re-training for jobs in growth areas. A more climate-friendly economy should yield more jobs, not less. Studies on energy and employment conclude that investing capital in saving energy through efficiency creates on average four times as many jobs as investing the same capital in producing energy from fossil fuels. Investing in renewable energy sources creates on average 1.5 times as many jobs as investing in conventional energy development.

Reality Kyoto does not mean job loss. It will involve job shift over time and could well mean more jobs!

Myth: Alberta has a better "made-in-Canada" solution

Kyoto opponents argue for a "made in Canada" solution to climate change and Alberta claims to have such a plan. Well, Kyoto is designed to allow each country to make its own solution. It specifies what results nations have to achieve, but does not prescribe how a country meets its reduction targets. Painfully negotiated over five years, Kyoto uses targets to allocate each industrialized country a fair share of the limited amount of space in the atmosphere for disposal of GHGs. Not having targets and timelines would be absurd, because there would be no reason for any country to take action and no way to measure compliance. It would be like countries agreeing to share the fish in the ocean, but avoiding quotas to assign each one a fair share. Global environmental problems require international agreements, targets and rules.

When Alberta argues for a "made in Canada" solution it is really demanding the right to ignore internationally negotiated targets and timelines, and take as much additional space in the atmosphere for dumping waste gases as it wants, for as long as it wants. Letting Alberta's emissions total grow by 39% above 1990 levels by 2010, as proposed in the latest Alberta plan, is not an alternative plan to Kyoto - it is a recipe for sabotaging international efforts to protect climate. If others do as Alberta proposes, there will be no GHG reductions, no climate protection - and no solution.

Reality Kyoto provides for a made in Canada solution. The Alberta "plan" doesn't solve anything - instead, it sabotages international efforts to protect climate.

Myth: Energy costs will sky-rocket

Even if drivers had to pay for the full cost of GHG emissions out of their tailpipe PLUS the emissions oil companies create to produce the fuel, then gasoline might go up about 6 cents per litre.* In Alberta, gas prices regularly shift 15 cents or more. If you're worried about high gas prices, lobby the U.S. to rethink war in the Middle East, or ask the oil companies to manage refinery capacity better.

On the same basis, the Kyoto-driven increase in electricity rates would be about 1.2 cents per kilowatt-hour* - a small fraction of the increase in Alberta's rates since the government de-regulated the electricity system. If you care about high electricity prices, get the provincial government to fix the mess from deregulation.

* (This assumes a price of \$17.00 per tonne for CO₂ credits or allowances - at the high end of the "probable" range)

Reality The worst-case price increases consumers might face under Kyoto are less than half of price hikes we already face.

Myth: The U.S. won't - so Canada can't

Yes, the U.S. currently refuses to ratify Kyoto, but U.S. federal departments and state governments are doing far more to control GHGs than we are. Why? American citizens demand action to clean up local air pollution, deal with electricity shortages, create a secure energy supply, accelerate innovation and commercialize new technology. The U.S. is way ahead of Canada in areas like support for renewable energy, investment in public transit, funding clean technology research, and regulations that cap GHG emissions. Texas is installing more than 2,000 megawatts of wind capacity while Alberta considers a wind "megaproject" of 100 megawatts. When we do implement Kyoto, Canada will be catching up with the U.S. on concrete actions, not getting ahead.

And, Canada will continue to offer very favourable exchange rates, a skilled labour force, guaranteed American access to our energy supplies, competitive tax and health care costs, and superior pipeline and transportation infrastructure. These factors help make Canada the lowest-cost place to do business among leading industrial economies. Implementing Kyoto will not significantly change that.

Reality Under Kyoto, our energy sources will stay competitive. The Americans are already way ahead of us on supporting efficiency, renewables and clean technologies.

Myth: The energy industry is united against Kyoto

Many energy companies complain that Kyoto could drive investment out of the province. However, some of Alberta's largest and most successful corporations are quietly preparing to manage GHG emissions as just one more cost of business - even a chance for new business. Statements by Suncor, Shell, BP, and others clearly indicate that they do not believe Kyoto, if implemented intelligently, will affect their plans in Alberta. They may not love the idea, but they have a plan to cope and thrive. They see affordable ways to reduce their own emissions and are active in emissions trading markets buying credits to make up the difference.

Companies vocally against Kyoto are in a last ditch effort to pressure politicians to avoid taking action on climate protection. Maybe they're worried about being behind the industry leaders who have been preparing for Kyoto for years - companies that will grow and prosper in Alberta because they accepted the climate protection challenge early on. That's called free enterprise.

Reality Progressive, responsible energy companies are not fighting Kyoto because they're prepared for it. They will grow faster at the expense of companies that aren't.

Myth: We have not been consulted

Formal consultations with industry, environmental and provincial government representatives on Canada's national strategy on climate change have been underway since the mid-1990s. The latest round began in 1998 when federal and provincial governments set up the National Climate Change Process (co-chaired by Alberta until May 2002). Four years of intensive consultations cost millions of dollars. Experts from all sectors worked together to develop dozens of studies, reports and hundreds of recommendations. Check them out at www.nccp.ca. Federal and provincial ministers of energy and environment also met several times during this period, allowing full "fed-prov" consultation.

Those saying, "We have not been consulted!" really mean "Let's delay - we're still not happy about reducing emissions!" Well, the federal government has finally determined that climate protection can no longer be held hostage to a search for consensus. However, they have been listening and key demands by Alberta for minimizing costs to the energy sector and sharing any burden have been accepted - making comparisons with the much-hated national energy program totally absurd.

Reality Alberta has been in continuous consultations with the federal government since the mid 1990s and has had more influence on the shape of the Kyoto plan than any other stakeholder.

Myth: There is no federal plan!

The National Climate Change Process developed more than 300 concrete measures to reduce GHG emissions in Canada. Federal and provincial governments have conducted enough economic analysis of various combinations of these measures to show that we can meet Kyoto targets at a reasonable cost and with significant benefits. In October 2002, the federal government released a draft Kyoto implementation plan proposing the amounts of emission reductions for each sector of the economy (industry, transportation, buildings etc.), and describing policy measures to achieve those reductions. Their plan needs further refinement, but it is more detailed and convincing than the plan released by the government of Alberta.

Reality After a decade of analysis we know we can meet our Kyoto target. Talk will only turn into detailed action plans when Canada ratifies the Kyoto Protocol and has to meet international obligations.