



SCAN! is Calling for Emergency Climate Action at All Levels of Government

Climate Change and Your Health

People suffer and die in heat waves, floods, droughts, and fires. Our reliance on fossil fuels is increasing these climate catastrophes. There are two aspects to the climate emergency and our health: the problems associated with the extraction of fossil fuels and the health effects of climate catastrophes on humans, as well as animal habitats.

Aside from the catastrophic events, climate change also causes the disruption of food systems. Warm winters can lead to less snow – and, consequently, less water – and early growth, subject to frost. British Columbia's wine industry was devastated after two years of climate related crop losses. Food prices soar when farmers lose crops. It is harder to buy healthy, fresh food.

Destruction of habitats leads to breakdowns in the animal/human barrier, leading to what are called zoonotic diseases like bird flu and COVID-19.

Even the personal use of fossil fuels can affect our health directly when we use gas for heating and cooking. Gas stoves emit pollutants that irritate human airways and can cause or exacerbate respiratory problems.

A Few Statistics

Fossil fuel air pollution is responsible for one in seven premature deaths in Canada. These toxic emissions drive higher rates of disease that increase costs in an already overburdened health-care system. Canada now has the world's highest rate of new childhood asthma cases after Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

Fossil Fuel Extraction

The development of Alberta's oil sands (AKA the tar sands) has increased levels of cancer-causing compounds in surrounding lakes well beyond expected levels. The documentary *H2Oil* revealed this effect in 2009.

Hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking, extracts methane from the ground. Over 20 years, methane is 84 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in warming the atmosphere. And each fracked gas well can use tens of millions of litres of clean water that is then permanently contaminated. Fracking is also implicated in earthquakes.

Wildfires

When forests are cut down, they release stored carbon into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide. When forests burn, they also cause CO₂ emissions. In Canada, wildfires produced 23% of the global wildfire carbon emissions for 2023.

Far from the site of the fires, smoke travels thousands of kilometers, causing respiratory distress from its particulates.

Heat and Health

People who cannot afford air conditioning are at risk for heat stroke during a heat wave. People who are unhoused do not have ready access to cooling centres. Seniors are particularly susceptible to the effects of heat.

In British Columbia, 800 deaths were investigated in the summer of 2021. 619 were heat related. Most who died were older adults with compromised health and who lived alone.