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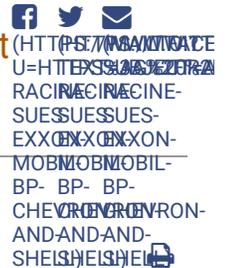


Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (/)



Newsroom

AG Racine Sues Exxon Mobil, BP, Chevron, and Shell for Misleading Consumers About the Role Fossil Fuels Play in Climate Change



June 25, 2020

Companies Spent Millions to Undermine Climate Science, Grossly Exaggerated "Green" Investments, All to Protect Profits

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Attorney General Karl A. Racine today sued Exxon Mobil, BP, Chevron, and Shell for systematically and intentionally misleading District consumers about the role their products play in causing climate change. The Office of the Attorney General's (OAG) lawsuit alleges major players in the fossil fuel industry knew as early as the 1950s that emissions from burning oil and gas posed an existential threat to humanity—and in response, the companies embarked on a multi-decade, multi-million-dollar public relations campaign to foment doubt and hostility towards climate research in order to protect profits. As the scientific consensus around fossil fuels and climate change grew, the companies then exaggerated their commitments to reducing reliance on fossil fuels and concealing their products' harm—a practice that persists today. OAG is asking the court to order the companies to end their disinformation campaigns, provide relief for District consumers, and pay civil penalties.

"For decades, these oil and gas companies spent millions to mislead consumers and discredit climate science in pursuit of profits," said AG Racine. **"The defendants violated the District's consumer protection law by concealing the fact that using fossil fuels threatens the health of District residents and the environment. OAG filed this suit to end these disinformation campaigns and to hold these companies accountable for their deceptive practices."**

Exxon Mobil, BP, Shell, and Chevron are among the world's largest multinational producers of oil and gas. Exxon Mobil is incorporated in New Jersey and headquartered in Irving, Texas, while Chevron is incorporated in Delaware and headquartered in San Ramon, California. BP, headquartered in London, England, and Shell, headquartered in the Hague, Netherlands, are both incorporated in England and Wales. All four serve as parent companies for numerous subsidiaries that explore, extract, refine, transport, market, and sell oil, gas, and other petroleum products, and all four have subsidiaries registered in the District of Columbia. These companies have employed and financed several industry associations and industry-created front groups that carry out climate change disinformation and denial missions—including, the American Petroleum Institute and Global Climate Coalition.

Along with these industry associations and front groups, the companies choreographed a public relations effort modeled on Big Tobacco's denial of tobacco's harm, while privately investing in projects to protect existing fossil fuel infrastructure from the impacts of climate change. The companies not only employed the Advancement of Sound Science Coalition—a fake grassroots citizen group created by Big Tobacco as part of the industry's misinformation campaign—they also funded and promoted some of the same scientists hired by tobacco companies. These scientists disputed the conclusions of climate researchers, despite not having any training in climate science themselves. As the public learned that defendants knew of their products' role in causing climate change, the companies pivoted to misleading the public about their investments in sustainable energy and transition from fossil fuels.

The District's Consumer Protection Procedures Act (CPPA) prohibits businesses from engaging in deceptive and unfair treatment of District consumers. In its suit, OAG alleges that the companies violated the CPPA by engaging in misleading acts and practices around the marketing, promotion, and sale of fossil fuel products, including:

- **Executing a long-term communications campaign to undermine climate change science:** The companies, and front groups, enacted a decades-long public relations campaign that misrepresented and concealed the products. The entities funded scientists who cast doubt upon climate science and falsely argued that the evidence connection to climate change was insufficient. They generated media coverage around claims that the scientific uncertainties and published "advertorials"—paid advertisements designed to appear to readers as actual edit

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not prove a connection between burning fossil fuels and rising global temperatures.

- **Misrepresenting the scale of investments to reduce carbon emissions:** The companies grossly exaggerated their commitment to and investment in to reduce carbon footprints. For example, the defendants have all purchased advertising space trumpeting efforts to develop alternative energy sources in publications such as the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Politico* and *The Economist*, online, and in D.C.'s Metro system. Yet the green energy commitments touted in those ads represent a tiny fraction of their actual capital spending. Between 2010 and 2018, BP spent only 2.3 percent of total capital expenditures on low-carbon energy sources. Shell directed just 1.2 percent towards "greener" energy. For both Exxon Mobil and Chevron, "green" investments make up just 0.2 percent of capital spending. The rest of the companies' investments focused on maintaining and expanding fossil fuel production. As of last year, Exxon Mobil and Shell projected a 35 percent increase in oil production efforts between 2018 and 2030, while BP's oil and gas production is expected to rise by over 20 percent.
- **Obscuring the damaging impact their products have on the environment:** The companies' current marketing of their fossil fuel products misleads consumers by hyping relative "green" benefits and concealing that the products continue to contribute to catastrophic climate change. These "greenwashing" efforts paint certain products as "safe," "clean," and "emissions reducing," falsely suggesting the products are beneficial to the environment. For example, BP and Shell both assert in advertising that natural gas products are "cleaner than coal" or "cleaner burning." These claims are based solely on combustion emissions and omits the significant carbon impacts from producing and transporting natural gas.

A copy of the complaint is available at: <https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/DC-v-Exxon-BP-Chevron-Shell-Filed-Complaint.pdf> (<https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/DC-v-Exxon-BP-Chevron-Shell-Filed-Complaint.pdf>).

OAG's Environmental Work

Over the last two years, OAG has deployed additional resources (supported by the D.C. Council) to [protect the environment](https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/OAG-Environmental-Work.pdf) (<https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/OAG-Environmental-Work.pdf>) and address persistent local environmental problems, including those that disproportionately impact low-income communities. For example, OAG [filed suit against Ward 5 businesses](https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-sues-automotive-companies-illegal-oil) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-sues-automotive-companies-illegal-oil>) that repeatedly spilled toxic oil into streets and District waterways and forced a landlord to [clean up toxic lead paint](https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-announces-neglectful-landlord-must-clean) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-announces-neglectful-landlord-must-clean>) that put children at risk. OAG is deeply involved in the District's ongoing cleanup of the Anacostia River and recently filed a lawsuit against [agrochemical company Monsanto for contaminating](https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-sues-monsanto-knowingly-promoting-and) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-sues-monsanto-knowingly-promoting-and>), the District's natural resources with toxic chemicals. Greyhound, in a [settlement with OAG](https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-announces-greyhound-adopt-national-anti) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/ag-racine-announces-greyhound-adopt-national-anti>), resolving a lawsuit over air pollution violations at Union Station, will adopt national bus anti-idling policies nationwide. Additionally, OAG has joined numerous multistate lawsuits to stop the Trump administration from rolling back critical environmental protections, such as [auto emissions standards](https://oag.dc.gov/release/district-joins-18-state-coalition-defend-national) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/district-joins-18-state-coalition-defend-national>), and [Clean Water Act rules](https://oag.dc.gov/release/attorney-general-racine-joins-coalition-suing) (<https://oag.dc.gov/release/attorney-general-racine-joins-coalition-suing>).

Attachments

[DC-v-Exxon-BP-Chevron-Shell-Filed-Complaint.pdf](https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/DC-v-Exxon-BP-Chevron-Shell-Filed-Complaint.pdf) (<https://oag.dc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/DC-v-Exxon-BP-Chevron-Shell-Filed-Complaint.pdf>).

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