



Fossil Fuel Divestment Communications Guide

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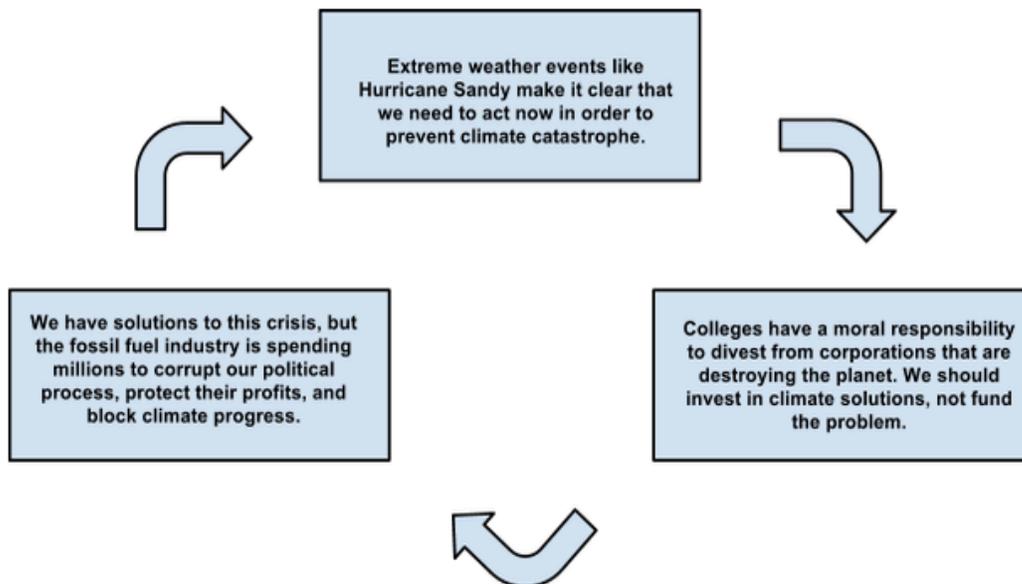
Introduction

This is a guide to help anyone working on fossil fuel divestment communicate effectively about the campaign, whether you're doing an interview with the press or just talking to an interested bystander.

Quick tip: when doing a phone interview, keep this guide open so that you can reference it easily!

Messaging Triangle

Good communicators often tell short, compelling stories that hit over-and-over again on their main points. A “messaging triangle” is a helpful tool that links each element of your story. You can start at any point of the triangle, depending on the question or context, and then connect to the other points.



Here are some examples of how you can use the triangle:



Why do colleges need to divest from fossil fuels?

Our college shouldn't continue to invest in companies that are causing the climate crisis. Extreme weather events like Hurricane Sandy make it clear we need to act now in order to avoid climate catastrophe. We have the solutions to solve this crisis, but we won't see any political progress on the issue until the fossil fuel industry stops spending millions to corrupt our democracy.

Shouldn't we work with the fossil fuel industry instead of divesting?

The fossil fuel industry has spent hundreds of millions of dollars over the last decade to block any political action on climate change. Now, we know they plan on burning five times more carbon dioxide than scientists say is safe. This is a rogue industry and it's immoral for our colleges to continue investing in it. Unless we act now, we'll continue to see more extreme weather events like Hurricane Sandy. That's not a future we should leave for our children.

Isn't divestment a radical demand?

There's nothing radical about asking for a planet that resembles something like the one we grew up on. Climate change is loading the dice for more extreme weather events like Hurricane Sandy and the drought, wildfires, and floods that preceded it. The CEOs at fossil fuel companies are the radicals: they're planning on burning five times more carbon dioxide than scientists say is safe to burn. Our universities have a moral obligation to disassociate themselves with this rogue industry.

As you can see, each answer hits on each point of the triangle -- extreme weather, the fossil fuel industry, and colleges' moral obligation to act -- in some way.

Messaging Arc

Another useful tool is a messaging arc. Think of this as the core narrative you want to share with people when they ask you a general question about your campaign. Each point works on its own, but it's best when you can tie it together. We've given you a super short and more extended messaging arc below.

Super short:

1. We're calling on colleges and universities to divest from the fossil fuel corporations.
2. It's immoral to be invested in companies that are causing the climate crisis and spending millions of dollars to block solutions.
3. Divestment is a clear way for educational institutions to live up to their values and help society address the climate crisis.

Longer:

1. Extreme weather events like Hurricane Sandy and the drought, heat-wave, and wildfires that ravaged much of America this year, are potent reminders that we



need to act now in order to avoid climate catastrophe.

2. Scientists have defined “catastrophe” as any global warming beyond 2 degrees Celsius. We can emit roughly another 500 gigatons of carbon dioxide and still stay below 2 degrees. But the fossil fuel industry has 2,795 gigatons of carbon dioxide in their reserves. In other words, they’re burning five times more carbon than it’s safe to burn.
3. We have the clean energy solutions necessary to prevent climate catastrophe, but we’re never going to see the political action needed to put them into place unless we can weaken the fossil fuel industry’s stranglehold on Washington.
4. Every year, the fossil fuel industry spends millions of dollars to spread misinformation about climate change, warp our political progress, and block clean energy solutions. They’re greed for profit is threatening the entire planet.
5. In the past, colleges, along with cities, states, religious institutions, and pension funds, have divested from rogue industries, like Big Tobacco, or immoral regimes, such as Apartheid South Africa. Now, it’s time to divest from fossil fuels.
6. Divestment is a clear way for educational institutions to live up to their values and help society address the climate crisis.

Talking Points

Here are some additional talking points that can help you make the case for divestment:

- Hurricane Sandy and the recent string of extreme weather events make it clear that we’re running out of time to avoid climate catastrophe.
- Every year, the fossil fuel industry spends *hundreds of millions of dollars* to corrupt our political process and block any action on climate change. They’re profiting while our children and communities pay the price.
- We shouldn’t be putting our money into an industry that is polluting our planet and corrupting our democracy.
- This is particularly true for colleges and universities. We shouldn’t be paying for our students education with investments that will destroy the planet they’re going to inherit.
- It’s time for colleges and universities to divest from the fossil fuel industry.
- Complete divestment is difficult, so we’ve made it easier. We’re asking for an immediate freeze on *new* investments in the fossil fuel industry and for a complete phase out over the next five years. This is not only manageable, it’s the right thing to do.
- There’s no doubt that the fossil fuel industry is profitable, that’s because they’ve been able to pollute for free and make us pay the cost for years.



- But there are lots of ways to make money beyond fossil fuels, whether it's in other profitable investments, putting money into new clean energy technology, or investing in greening campus infrastructure.
- The bottom line is that divestment is the only moral choice for institutions that care about the economy, society, and planet their students are going to inherit.
- In the 1980s, 155 campuses and a number of major pension funds, cities, and corporations divested from apartheid South Africa, helping accelerate that country's journey to freedom.
- Now, we need to declare our freedom from fossil fuels. Divestment is the first step.

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

As you work on fossil fuel divestment, you'll probably get asked the same questions over and over again. Here are some answers to the most frequently asked questions. (See above for answers to: *Why do colleges need to divest from fossil fuels? Shouldn't we work with the fossil fuel industry instead of divesting? Isn't divestment a radical demand?*)

What exactly are you asking for?

We want College and University Presidents and Boards (as well as Religious and Pension funds) to immediately freeze new investments in fossil fuel companies and fully drawdown their holdings within five years. Full divestment means not only ending direct investments, but leaving commingled funds that hold fossil fuel equities and corporate bonds.

The specific fossil fuel companies we are targeting are the 200 companies and state-held enterprises that hold the vast majority of the world's carbon reserves. They are the entities that have the power to do what science says is necessary to keep global warming below 2°C: leave 80% of known carbon reserves in the ground.

What are you asking the fossil fuel companies to do? When would you reinvest?

We'll know that corporations are serious about becoming energy companies instead of just fossil fuel companies when they meet these three demands: they need immediately to stop exploring for new hydrocarbons, they need to stop lobbying to preserve their special breaks, and, most importantly, they need to pledge to keep 80% of their current reserves underground forever.

The college is already greening it's campus, why does it have to do more?

It's great to see colleges greening their campuses, but we need them to green their portfolio as well. In fact, it's entirely inconsistent for a college to reduce emissions on campus only to invest in companies increasing emissions around the world. Universities shouldn't be investing in an industry that is destroying the planet that students are inheriting.



Won't divestment make us lose money?

There's no doubt that the fossil fuel industry is the most profitable enterprise on the planet, but that's because they cheat. Alone among industries, the fossil fuel industry gets to pollute for free and make use bear the cost of a warming planet.

Luckily, there are other ways to make profit. Whether it's investing in the clean energy economy or putting money into a revolving loan-fund to green the campus, colleges and universities have an increasing number of options when it comes to investing their endowment in a socially responsible way.

Shouldn't the college stay out of politics?

We understand that divestment can be an uncomfortable step for a college to take, but these are not ordinary times. Scientists have made it clear that we're running out of time to address the climate crisis. As institutions dedicated not to profit, but to educating the next generation, colleges and universities have a special responsibility to help protect the future of our planet.

Divestment is a serious step, but considering our current crisis, it's the only moral thing to do. We're not asking colleges to get involved in politics, we're asking them to do what's right.

Will divestment actually make an impact?

Divestment has made a big impact before, especially in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. In the end, over 155 campuses and many cities, states, and companies, divested from South Africa, speeding the transition to an open democracy.

A fossil fuel divestment movement will help take away the social license of the fossil fuel industry, weakening their political power. It will also start an important discussion in the market about the long-term viability of fossil fuels and the need to transition to clean energy economy. Finally, this campaign will help create a new generation of student leaders who can help push our leaders to address the climate crisis.

Who is involved in this campaign?

This fossil fuel divestment movement is driven from the ground up by thousands of volunteer organizers across the country. The effort is coordinated by a new campaign called Fossil Free, which led by 350.org with the support of the Responsible Endowments Coalition, the Energy Action Coalition, the Sierra Student Coalition, the Sustainable Endowments Institute, As You Sow, and others.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are a great way to raise the issue of divestment on campus. Remember, your letter to the editor should be unique -- don't just copy and paste from this guide or our website!

The best letters often have a compelling hook, then get quickly to the point, and wrap things up in short order. This isn't a tweet, but you're more likely to get published the



more succinct you can be. To submit a letter, just search for your college newspaper online and find the submission information in their Opinion or Contact section.

Here are some themes to touch on in your letter:

- If you're writing as alumni, make sure to include when you graduated
- Describe how investing in the fossil fuel industry is antithetical to the values of the college
- If you were involved in previous divestment movements, reference those efforts
- Try and work through the messaging triangle, touching on extreme weather, the fossil fuel industry, and the need to divest
- Try and work in climate impacts that are local to your college
- If you're thinking of holding back a donation or taking some sort of other action, mention that in your letter

See the messaging arc and talking points above for some ideas about the content to include in your letter.

Here is a sample letter:

Dear Editor,

Middlebury's reputation as an environmental leader is threatened by the college continuing to invest its endowment in fossil fuel companies. Climate change is already loading the dice for extreme weather events like last year's Hurricane Irene, which battered much of Vermont. Now, recent reports show that the fossil fuel industry has five times more carbon in their reserves than scientists say we can burn and still keep warming below 2°C, a target that every country on earth has agreed to. Fossil fuel divestment is a clear way for Middlebury to live up to its values and help society address this crisis. As a regular donor to the college, I want to be assured that my money isn't being invested in companies that are wrecking the planet that future Middlebury students -- and all of our children -- will inherit.

Sincerely,
Jamie Henn, Class of 2007

Good luck, and be sure to share a link with us if your letter gets published online!

Sample Opinion Piece or Editorial

Just like a letter to the editor, opinion pieces are a great way to raise the issue of fossil fuel divestment. A good opinion piece often has a compelling hook, clearly lays out the argument you're trying to make, includes a few relevant facts and figures (ideally ones that might surprise the reader), and adds in a personal anecdote or reflection to make the piece come alive.

A great way to practice writing an oped is to go and read a few in your favorite news outlets. You'll probably begin to see patterns in the ways that people write.

Check out the messaging arc and talking points above to think about how you could



structure your own opinion piece. And if you do submit one, make sure to let us know about it -- especially if it gets published!

Here's a sample oped that was recently published in the Cornell Daily Sun by a recent graduate:

Any Person, Any Profit?

November 19, 2012

By Danny Pearlstein

I left Brooklyn for Ithaca to begin my first year at Cornell in August 2001, three weeks before the 9/11 attacks. I was terrified from afar as New York City entered a state of fear from which it has yet to fully emerge. Three weeks ago, with Hurricane Sandy, New York faced its most significant disruption since 9/11, plunging many New Yorkers back into shock. This time, high winds and an unprecedented storm surge wrought the destruction, but Sandy was no more natural a disaster than what brought down the World Trade Center.

I was very lucky on my uptown Manhattan hilltop. But around the region, my aunts, uncles and colleagues all lost power. My Long Island grandparents watched the floodwaters rise into their house; my parents drove out to rescue them and their cat. My downtown law office was closed for a week due to the power outage. Just a few blocks away, all the businesses on Water Street at the edge of the Financial District remained shuttered when I walked by more than two weeks later. Subway service is still abnormal, and I'm still riding through silt and around a downed tree on the bike path I take to work.

On November 16, I attended the New York City stop on 350.org's Do the Math Tour. Writer-activists Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein recounted three numbers: the 2009 commitment made in Copenhagen by nation-states including the United States and China to keep the climate from warming more than two degrees; the gigatons of additional carbon dioxide that the atmosphere can absorb before it will hit that mark; and the fact that proven fossil fuel reserves, if burned, would add five times as much carbon dioxide to the atmosphere as it can handle without warming more than two degrees. In other words, to remain profitable, the fossil fuel industry would blow us all right past the two degree mark, without even discovering any additional reserves, an unlikely scenario given the billions pumped into exploration.

When I was at Cornell, I got to know a corner of campus called Redbud Woods, which is now the University Avenue parking lot. From sophomore to senior year, I worked alongside hundreds of students, faculty, staff and other Ithacans to stop the lot and save the woods. Early in the campaign, I boasted to the press that we would win resoundingly and bring on "the Waterloo of parking lots," an end to the waste and despoliation of green space for car storage. It was not to be. Despite local government backing, Student Assembly support, nonviolent direct action, over a hundred arrests, and countless public demonstrations of love for the woods and outrage at the prospect of yet more asphalt where trees and grass once grew, we lost. As a member of Cornell's governing Board of Trustees warned me then, the money had already been allocated as part of the overall West Campus upgrade. The lot was a fait accompli before I even heard of it.



As ever, ecological destruction requires financing. As an institutional investor, with nearly \$6 billion to its name, Cornell is one hefty financier, responsible for where the money lands, where it grows. Investing in fossil fuels, whatever the short-term upside for the University, actively advances planetary catastrophe. Moreover, just as the fight over Redbud Woods cost Cornell in years of litigation, police overtime, community benefits and local ire, Cornell will pay for its fossil fuel investments over and over. On Halloween, a day after Sandy, President Skorton emailed alumni that Cornell facilities in New York City were experiencing power outages and had suffered damage. Especially now, when Cornell is making a massive new investment on vulnerable Roosevelt Island, investing in fossil fuels seriously undermines the University's educational mission. The Tech Campus renderings are gorgeous. It would be a real shame if the site were submerged before they were realized.

On campus, KyotoNOW demands that Cornell match its commitment to carbon neutrality with divestment from fossil fuel companies. KyotoNOW's 2001 sit-in was pivotal in winning the neutrality pledge, and emboldened the campaign to save Redbud Woods. As McKibben warns, there may be yet more arrests before divestment is won. He would like to see the elder citizens, particularly tenured faculty members, handcuffed first. And as an alumnus, I pledge that I will divest in Cornell until Cornell divests in global warming. I urge my fellow alumni to follow suit. This is too important an issue to defer to the old saw that we had better donate for the sake of our rank. A drop in the rankings is a drop in the bucket when rising seas engulf our cities.

President Skorton, Chair Harrison and Trustees, the fight to stop climate change is your fight. If we little people could solve the problem by cutting the carbon out of our lives, we would do it. We have no stake in a warmed globe; quite the contrary. But as institutional investors, you are among the privileged few, able to transform the policy dialogue and deny the fossil fuel industry its requisite capital. Think of your fiduciary responsibility to keep the University's physical plant operational. Think too of what you owe your family and community members, who have placed such awesome trust in you. And think fast.

Danny Pearlstein graduated from the College of Art, Architecture and Planning in 2005.

We're excited to get this debate about fossil fuel divestment going around the country and each of your editorials will help us hone our arguments. Make sure to share them with us at divest@350.org as they get published.

Thank you again for joining us in this national effort to divest from fossil fuels!