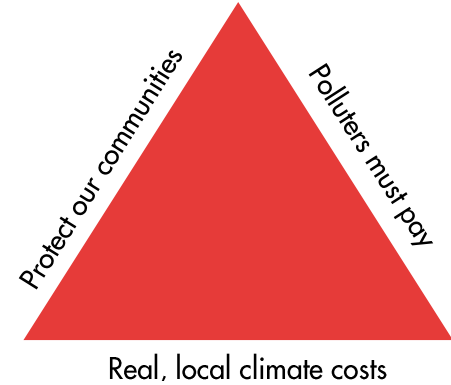


Climate Costs Messaging

If you're excited to talk with others about why our communities should take climate action, including holding fossil fuel companies accountable for their role in climate change, this guide describes a messaging framework you can use to explain how climate action helps protect our communities and why holding fossil fuel companies accountable contributes to solving the climate crisis.

The Messaging Triangle is built on three core pillars. Using these three pillars together can help you speak confidently and effectively about climate costs and costs recovery.



The Message Pillar	Key Message
Real, local climate costs	Climate change threatens, and imposes heavy costs on, you, your community and communities across BC.
Protect our communities	We can protect our communities by building infrastructure, services and community connections that withstand extreme weather and climate events and by reducing fossil fuel pollution.
Polluters must pay	Burning oil, gas and coal is the primary cause of climate change, and fossil fuel companies from decades ago until now have worked against real climate solutions so that they can make massive profits.

Your messaging will be strongest if you use all three pillars, especially if you draw on local examples of climate costs and solutions that can help address those types of impacts. For many audiences you should begin with the costs pillar, moving to options for protection, and concluding with fossil fuel company accountability. For other audiences it might make sense to start with one or the other of the pillars.

In addition, for those working specifically on pressing local governments to bring a climate costs recovery class action, we provide a fourth messaging pillar.

We also provide some sample responses, based on the messaging triangle, to commonly used attacks on climate messaging.

This booklet is informed by polling conducted by Stratcom in 2026,¹ a messaging triangle developed by Breakthrough Solutions and the Sightline Institute,² and other climate communications advice.

¹ <https://www.wcel.org/publication/bc-polling-results-show-how-bc-residents-view-climate-costs>.

² Breakthrough Strategies and Solutions and the Sightline Institute: *Climate Solutions for a Stronger America: A Guide for Engaging and Winning on Climate Change and Clean Energy* (2nd Ed., 2014), https://media.wix.com/ugd/ef28c1_fb488dd8246a4996845734531f2eadcd.pdf.

PILLAR 1

Our communities are paying the costs of climate change

Key message: Our communities are paying the costs of climate change. Climate change threatens and imposes heavy costs on you, your community and communities across BC.

Antidote to: “Climate change is a distant problem that we can solve later.”

Key supporting facts:

- In 2021, more than 600 people died in BC in the heat dome, the town of Lytton was burned down, and financial costs from climate impacts in BC were in the tens of billions of dollars. Scientists calculate that the heat dome was 150 times more likely to occur due to climate change.³
- The costs of food,⁴ home insurance,⁵ water and rebuilding after climate disasters are among the many daily costs that are increasing due to climate change.
- Critical infrastructure – such as roads, storm drains and buildings – breaks down faster, and is more expensive to maintain, because of increases in heat and precipitation due to climate change. Canadian governments are currently spending an extra \$8.8 billion each year to maintain basic infrastructure due to climate change.⁶
- Vancouver reports spending over \$50 million each year addressing climate impacts, while Surrey spends \$20 million annually on coastal flooding alone.⁷ Does your community know how much it is spending because of climate change?

Tips and Strategies:

- Talk about the local climate impacts and costs facing your own community. Have you experienced impacts from flooding, wildfires, extreme heat or drought?⁸ Tell your story. Talk about climate impacts as real and urgent.
- Talk about costs that your audience is concerned about and how they are connected to climate change. Link climate change to rising food prices, insurance premiums, taxes and other costs.

Why this key message works:

- Climate change is not a far-off problem; British Columbians have already experienced wildfires, smoke, drought, flooding and other impacts, and recognize that climate change is driving up costs in more subtle ways. Talking about local impacts, and the importance of protecting our communities from those impacts, grounds the climate crisis in our personal experiences and emphasizes that it is urgent and already happening.
- Majorities of British Columbians link climate change to rising food prices, threats to water, insurance premiums and other climate costs.²

³ <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/western-north-american-extreme-heat-virtually-impossible-without-human-caused-climate-change/>.

⁴ <https://suebigoil.ca/climate-costs-food/>.

⁵ <https://suebigoil.ca/climate-driven-insurance-crisis-strengthens-the-case-against-big-oil/>.

⁶ <https://suebigoil.ca/potholes-and-deteriorating-water-systems-are-costly-climate-disasters/>.

⁷ <https://suebigoil.ca/surreys-rising-climate-costs/>.

⁸ Research local climate impacts through the Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium (PCIC)'s [regional assessments](#) and the [Plan2Adapt](#) web tool.

PILLAR 2

We can protect our communities from climate threats

Key message: We can protect our communities by building infrastructure, services and community connections that withstand extreme weather and climate events and by reducing fossil fuel pollution.

Antidote to: “Climate change is too big and scary to do anything about.”

Key supporting facts:

- Far fewer people died per capita in the BC Interior during the 2021 heat dome than in the Lower Mainland, despite higher temperatures, largely because they were better prepared.⁹
- A combination of building climate resilient infrastructure and reducing fossil fuel pollution can reduce the costs of climate change by 75%.¹⁰ Individually, each avoids about 50% of future harm.
- On average, \$1 spent on preparing for climate change can yield \$15 in direct savings and a further \$10 for the local economy.¹¹
- Failure to upgrade infrastructure to better withstand increased heat and precipitation is by far the most expensive option – just in terms of increased maintenance costs for the infrastructure itself.¹²
- Every tonne of fossil fuel pollution that we avoid saves the world hundreds of dollars in future costs.

Tips and Strategies:

- Identify local climate risks and talk to your neighbours about what you will collectively need if those risks materialize.
- Press your elected officials to build infrastructure that will protect your community from climate disasters. Does your community have a climate preparedness plan and are they implementing it?
- Point out that our communities can and should be spending what is required to protect ourselves from climate change (climate resilience); these impacts will keep getting worse as long as we keep burning fossil fuels.

Why this key message works:

This message counters the helplessness that comes with the belief that there is nothing we can do about climate change. By focusing on efforts to protect our local community from climate costs, climate change shifts from being a global problem to something that can directly affect ourselves and our neighbours.

⁹ [BC Coroner's report.](#)

¹⁰ [https://climateinstitute.ca/reports/damage-control/.](https://climateinstitute.ca/reports/damage-control/)

¹¹ [https://climateinstitute.ca/reports/damage-control/.](https://climateinstitute.ca/reports/damage-control/)

¹² [https://suebigoil.ca/potholes-and-deteriorating-water-systems-are-costly-climate-disasters/.](https://suebigoil.ca/potholes-and-deteriorating-water-systems-are-costly-climate-disasters/)

PILLAR 3

Polluters must pay

Key message: Who should pay for the costs of climate change? Fossil fuel companies have known for decades that burning oil, gas and coal is the primary cause of climate change,¹³ and actively worked against real climate solutions, so that they can make massive profits. They need to pay their fair share.

Antidote to: “We’re all responsible for climate change, so we can’t hold anyone responsible”

Key supporting facts:

- Over three-quarters of greenhouse gas emissions in 2023 came from burning fossil fuels for energy.¹⁴
- Just 90 oil, gas and coal producers are responsible for almost 2/3 of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions. The largest (Chevron, Exxon, Saudi Aramco) are responsible for about 2-3% each.¹⁵
- Oil industry scientists warned about the risks of climate change in the 1960s. In the 1970s and 80s they developed solar cells, low-emission vehicles and advised industry that fossil fuel production would need to decline. They were ignored.
- Fossil fuel companies engaged in and funded massive campaigns to mislead the public on climate science. One industry plan promised that “victory would be achieved” when those promoting climate action on the basis of science appear to be “out of touch with reality.”¹⁶
- The false solutions offered by the oil industry all require someone else to pay for the impacts of their products. For example, Carbon Capture and Storage, in addition to requiring massive taxpayer subsidies, would (if effective) only reduce emissions from production – but not use of – oil.

Tips and strategies:

- Reject claims that only consumers cause fossil pollution. Manufacturers who sell a product that will inevitably cause harm share responsibility.
- Both the fossil fuel industry and individuals have a role to play in solving the climate crisis, but right now individuals pay 100% of climate costs, and Big Oil is off the hook.
- If the fossil fuel industry doesn’t pay for climate costs it appears hugely profitable to governments and investors, creating incentives to work against climate action.
- Become familiar with the role of the fossil fuel industry in delaying climate action.
- Climate lawsuit advice on the next page.

Why this key message works:

Individuals are being asked to make massive sacrifices to address climate costs. It’s not fair that hugely profitable companies are not paying their share, particularly given their efforts to keep society using fossil fuels.

By focusing on the outside role of the fossil fuel companies in causing the problem, and the fact that they have the resources needed to keep our communities safe, people can see a clear path forward to addressing the climate crisis.

¹³ <https://www.clientearth.org/latest/news/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>.

¹⁴ <https://www.wri.org/insights/4-charts-explain-greenhouse-gas-emissions-countries-and-sectors>.

¹⁵ <https://climateaccountability.org/carbonmajors.html>.

¹⁶ <https://climateinvestigations.org/climate-deniers/cooler-heads-coalition/>.

BONUS PILLAR**A climate costs recovery class action lawsuit can fund communities' climate action**

Key message: When local governments band together to sue the global fossil fuel industry for its fair share of our local climate costs, we can get back some of the money that we need to keep BC communities safe while ensuring that the costs of climate change are factored into business decisions.

Antidote to: "Fossil fuel companies are too big to take on" AND "there's not enough money to fight climate change."

Key supporting facts:

- Over seventy local and state governments are suing fossil fuel companies for climate costs in the U.S. and elsewhere.
- Courts have held that climate costs recovery cases are legally viable, including a German court ruling in 2025 that coal giant RWE could be liable for its contribution to climate damage¹⁷ and courts in several countries holding that similar cases have merit.
- 28 law professors from across Canada wrote to local governments in BC underscoring that there is a legal basis for a lawsuit against fossil fuel companies for climate costs.¹⁸
- Big Tobacco and Big Asbestos believed that they could not be sued, but lawsuits against them succeeded and changed the public perception of the industry. The lawsuit against Big Oil can do the same.
- When a class action lawsuit is launched, fossil fuel companies will need to notify their shareholders and investors that they are being sued, changing the business decisions that they and others will make.
- In a class action lawsuit many local governments work together to bring a lawsuit, sharing resources and keeping risks manageable.
- A lawsuit can be brought in BC courts against global fossil fuel companies because the damage occurred in BC. Rather than just targeting Canadian emissions, suing Big Oil lets us tackle climate change as a global problem.

Tips and strategies:

- Lawsuits can seem technical, but this is a conversation about who will pay for climate impacts and ensuring that industry cannot profit from harming others.
- Emphasize that legal experts say that a lawsuit against fossil fuel companies has a solid basis in Canadian law.
- Talk about a climate costs recovery lawsuit, emphasizing the purpose of the class action

Why this key message works:

- British Columbians are concerned about the threat to their communities posed by climate change and recognize the unfairness of having to pay 100% of the costs.
- Since these companies, and their investors, have assumed that the public will pay for climate change while they pocket the profits, a lawsuit directly challenges the business structures that have led to the climate crisis.

¹⁷ <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/germany-landmark-ruling-in-lliuya-v-rwe-strengthens-corporate-climate-accountability-say-experts/>.

¹⁸ https://allard.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/2020-08/Climate-Litigation-LawProfLetter_final2.pdf.

Sample Responses to Common Arguments

ATTACK:

Action on climate change is driving up the cost of living.

Response: Actually, food prices, home insurance premiums, taxes, and the costs of intensifying storms, floods and wildfires, are all going up because of climate change. These costs will continue to rise until we tackle climate change. Taking action now to protect our communities will save us so much money in the long run.

ATTACK:

We have more pressing priorities than dealing with the climate crisis.

Response: We can't ignore that climate change is harming all of us here and now – not just those evacuated from their homes during wildfires or floods. Droughts in other parts of the world drive up food prices, while increased wildfire risk is increasing home insurance costs. Governments are spending our money on upgrading roads, buildings, storm drains and other infrastructure to keep it functioning and us safe from climate disasters – and if they fail to do so it puts us all at risk. The same oil and gas industry scientists who told them decades ago to expect these and other impacts from burning fossil fuels also warned that things will only get worse if we don't start acting.

ATTACK:

Do you drive a car? Aren't you hypocritical for calling for a lawsuit against fossil fuel companies?

Response: You, me and our neighbours: we're all paying for the costs of climate change. It's not hypocritical to ask that fossil fuel companies also pay their fair share. What is hypocritical is an industry that knew decades ago that their products would cause climate change yet actively worked to limit our access to alternatives, thinking that it shouldn't pay for any of the costs that their products cause.

ATTACK:

We need to be supporting profitable, job creating industries like the oil and gas industry.

Response: These companies appear profitable only because we are paying for the harm that their products cause. When you consider the true costs of the fossil fuel industry, it's clear that renewable energy is more profitable. That's why a handful of responsible fossil fuel companies are reinventing themselves. For example, the Danish National Oil and Gas company is now Ørsted, one of the world's largest wind power companies in the world, and employs more people than when they focused on fossil fuels.

ATTACK:

It's counter productive to vilify the fossil fuel industry.

Response: It's not vilifying the fossil fuel industry to ask that they pay their fair share for harm caused by their products and that they address a business model that puts our communities at risk. It's undisputed that the industry knew decades ago that pollution from the burning of fossil fuels would cause the types of harm we're seeing in BC, and actively worked to keep cleaner alternatives off the market and delay government action to keep us safer. That's the type of behaviour that we expect from an industry that believes it can make massive profits without taking responsibility for harm their products cause. Until they pay their fair share, they'll continue to make decisions that prioritize their short-term profits over the safety of our communities.