

The Green Blog

Environmental and energy issues

By **Brian Nearing** | [About the Green Blog](#)

Following money and power in climate change debate

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One of my friends and I often debate climate change. Inevitably, he makes the assertion that all climate scientists around the world have been lying for grant money when they publish studies that show climate change is driven by accumulating man-made greenhouse gases from burning of fossil fuels.

It's a pretty nifty rhetorical device. It enables him to ignore every single bit of a growing body of science because the entire edifice is a lie fabricated by thousand of people around the world in a conspiracy that makes the DaVinci Code look like Sunday School. Peer-reviewed studies that support other studies are just a circle of lies, so none carry any weight, in that argument.

And yet, it doesn't seem to register with him when I counter that any scientist who could disprove the scientific consensus would be showered in mountains of cash from businesses that benefit from the greenhouse gas status quo. If a craven desire for money drives climate science, why would not this pack of liars lie for the highest bidder? For that question, he has no answer.

And the combined economic and political power of the grant machinery that supports various scientific enterprises, of which climate science is just one aspect, seems pretty paltry when compared to that possessed by multinational corporations whose business models would be threatened by curbs on greenhouse gas emissions.

Along these lines, the Union of Concerned Scientists today issued a [study](#) that looks at what major 28 corporations say publicly about climate change, and where they put millions of dollars in political campaigns, lobbying and support for political think tanks in efforts in attempts to influence the political debate.

Some businesses appear to agree with climate science publicly, apparently for public relations purposes, given that the majority of people understand there is a growing problem, but then take shrouded steps to undermine public policies supported by that same science aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

The report found 14 companies were "inconsistent in regard to their statements about climate change. While all companies in our sample stated they were taking voluntary internal action to reduce carbon emissions, half of them also misrepresented some

element of established climate science in their public communications. These companies included Ameren Corporation, Chesapeake Energy Corporation, ConocoPhillips, DTE Energy Company, Exxon Mobil Corporation, FMC Corporation, Marathon Oil Corporation, Murphy Oil Corporation, Occidental Petroleum Corporation, Peabody Energy Corporation, Progress Energy, Inc., TECO Energy, Inc., Valero Energy Corporation, and Waste Management, Inc.”

To quote a line made famous by Watergate: Follow the money.

According to the UCS press release: *Corporations skew the national dialogue on climate policy in a variety of ways—making inconsistent statements across different venues, attacking science through industry-supported organizations, and taking advantage of the secrecy allowed them by current legal and regulatory structures. Some corporations are contradictory in their actions, expressing concern about the threat of climate change in some venues—such as company websites, Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings, annual reports, or statements to Congress—while working to weaken policy responses to climate change in others.*

For example, ConocoPhillips has acknowledged on its website that “human activity...is contributing to increased concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere that can lead to adverse changes in global climate.” Yet in its comments on the 2009 EPA Endangerment Finding, the company claimed that “the support for the effects of climate change on public health and welfare is limited and is typified by a high degree of uncertainty.”

One way a company can work against effective climate policy while avoiding accountability for that work is to provide funding to outside groups that lobby against climate legislation and regulation or engage in advocacy campaigns against climate science. Such groups range from business associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers to front groups like the Heartland Institute.

Echoing the inconsistency in their other statements and actions on the issue, many companies belong to groups lobbying on both sides of the climate policy debate. For example, Caterpillar is affiliated both with the World Resources Institute and Nature Conservancy, which advocate global warming solutions, and with the Cato Institute and Heritage Foundation, which oppose them.