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Carbon Capture Technology Will Worsen the Climate Crisis and Further Endanger Marginalized Communities, Policy Brief Finds

Policymakers, philanthropists, and advocates in Louisiana and across the nation must pursue alternatives to carbon capture, climate experts say

Washington, DC — Policymakers, philanthropists, and advocates in Louisiana and across the nation must reject the fossil fuel industry’s initiatives to capture carbon emissions and store them underground in sedimentary rock and instead pursue solutions that have proven power to curb the climate crisis and protect marginalized communities.

So concludes a [new policy brief](#) published by the Center for Progressive Reform. The brief reveals the false promise of large-scale carbon capture use and storage technologies and offers specific recommendations that policymakers, philanthropists, and advocates can use to oppose large-scale rollouts of this technology and instead support just solutions to the climate crisis.

“Fossil fuel industries are seeking to use carbon capture at their existing and planned polluting facilities as a ‘climate action’ cover to keep extracting and selling oil and gas,” said Karen Sokol, professor at the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law and a Member Scholar at the Center for Progressive Reform. “What’s more, they want taxpayers to subsidize the massive infrastructure buildout required to support the industry’s use of the technology.”

“This is about climate and environmental justice,” said Robert Verchick, fellow Loyola New Orleans College of Law professor and Center for Progressive Reform Board President. “Rolling out carbon capture technology in industrial areas like Cancer Alley will only increase the risks and burdens that systemic racism has foisted on some Americans. If climate solutions aren’t just and equitable, they’re not real solutions. It’s as simple as that.”

Carbon capture is an energy-intensive, cost-prohibitive, and risk-laden process that involves capturing carbon dioxide from industrial smokestacks, converting it into a fluid, and transporting it via pipelines to underground wells for long-term storage or future use via extraction. Pursuing it threatens public and environmental health, delays the transition to clean energy, and disrupts efforts to meet climate goals laid out by the United States and the world in the United Nations Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Nevertheless, coal, oil, and gas companies are promoting carbon capture because they will profit from it — and are targeting Louisiana as an emerging hub because of the state’s concentration of carbon-emitting industrial facilities. Some policymakers — including Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards — are heedlessly backing these initiatives, including one that would site a \$4.5 billion carbon capture project in Ascension Parish. The brief urges Bel Edwards and other policymakers to abandon these efforts and invest in effective alternatives instead.

The policy brief — entitled [*The False Promise of Carbon Capture as a Climate Solution in Louisiana and Beyond*](#) — finds that:

- Carbon capture will exacerbate climate change and endanger public health among marginalized communities near Louisiana’s industrial corridor, aka “Cancer Alley,” which stretches from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Investing in carbon capture will prolong the state’s dependence on fossil fuels and incentivize future extraction, which will enable industrial facilities to continue polluting and further endanger marginalized communities.
- Pipeline and infrastructure construction will destroy thousands of acres of wetlands, forests, and coastal areas in southeast Louisiana and poses other health and environmental risks, including underground leakage into drinking water, induced earthquakes, and increased fossil fuel extraction and use.
- Carbon capture is on shaky scientific ground. To work, carbon must be stored and contained for *thousands of years* — a promise that cannot be met.
- Federal and state law limits corporate liability and legal consequences for carbon capture developers and prevents state and federal agencies from adequately overseeing these projects and addressing their cumulative health and environmental impacts. Louisiana agencies, unfortunately, have a poor track record in this area.

Instead of sinking billions into risky and dangerous ventures that threaten environmental justice, federal and state lawmakers, philanthropists, and advocates should work toward a just transition to renewable sources of energy, like solar, geothermal, and wind, the brief concludes. They should retrofit abandoned oil and gas infrastructure to support geothermal projects, particularly in northern Louisiana. And they must include marginalized communities in all climate mitigation and adaptation efforts and help them oppose carbon capture initiatives in Cancer Alley and other areas.

“Under the best-case scenario, investing in carbon capture is like buying a very expensive time bomb — and leaving future generations to cope with the monstrous effects when it explodes,” said brief co-author Katlyn Schmitt, policy analyst at the Center for Progressive Reform. “Louisiana can — and must — make a smarter and more just investment in clean energy to shift away from the types of pollution that have caused egregious harms to the state’s BIPOC and low-income communities.”

To learn more about this brief, visit <https://progressivereform.org/our-work/energy-environment/carbon-capture-louisiana-brief/>.

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