

***IPEN Policy Statement on***  
**Toxic Pollutants and the Fossil Fuel Life Cycle**

**Approved by the IPEN General Assembly  
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## IPEN Policy Statement on Toxic Pollutants and the Fossil Fuel Life Cycle

**Recognizing** that toxic pollutants are produced and released to the environment at every stage of the life cycles of coal, oil and natural gas including during:

- Exploration, mining<sup>1</sup> and extraction<sup>2</sup>
- Fossil fuel transport (by pipelines, rail, ships and trucks)
- Coal, oil and gas cleaning, refining and processing
- The use of coal, oil, diesel fuel and natural gas for electricity generation, for vehicular transport, and for heating
- Production of plastics and other synthetic organic<sup>3</sup> chemicals and materials
- Uses of synthetic organic chemicals and materials; and uses of products that contain synthetic organic chemicals and materials
- End-of-use disposal of petrochemical-derived chemicals, materials and products; and their ultimate environmental fates.

**Being Aware** that exposure to the toxic pollutants generated and released throughout the fossil fuel life cycle causes widespread and significant harm to human health and ecosystems.

**Noting** that many of these toxic pollutants can be addressed and possibly controlled within the frameworks of the BRS (Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm) Conventions and/or the Minamata Convention and/or the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

**Noting** also, however, that some significant toxic air pollutants released during the fossil fuel life cycle (such as PM<sub>2.5</sub> and others) may not be easily addressed within the BRS, Minamata and/or SAICM frameworks even though these pollutants are:

- Toxic when inhaled
- Classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as Group 1 carcinogens (carcinogenic to humans)
- Well-known to contribute to millions of premature deaths from heart disease, stroke, chronic lung disease, and respiratory infections.

**Recognizing** that major investments are being made to greatly expand global production and use of fossil fuel-derived plastics, and that this is a concern because:

- The life cycle of plastics is an important local and global source of toxic pollutants
- The world is confronted with a growing plastic waste burden that is difficult and often impossible to manage in a safe and environmentally sound manner
- Marine and aquatic ecosystems are increasingly polluted with plastic litter and fragments

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<sup>1</sup> Including especially, coal mining wastes and coal-refuse.

<sup>2</sup> Including especially unconventional extraction such as fracking, coal seam gas extraction, extracting bitumen from tar sands, and others.

<sup>3</sup> The term “synthetic organic” refers to compounds (chemicals or materials) that contain hydrocarbons and that are manufactured using feedstocks derived from oil, gas or coal.

- Terrestrial landscapes (agricultural, rural and urban) have become increasingly littered with plastic wastes, especially in countries with rudimentary or no capacity to manage these wastes
- Increased plastic production results in increased pollution from open burning of plastic wastes, from incineration of plastic wastes, and from combusting plastic wastes in waste-to-energy facilities.

**Noting** that effective and affordable alternatives to most major uses of fossil fuel-derived products are rapidly becoming available, including and especially renewable energy sources such as photovoltaic, wind, geothermal and others.

**Noting Further** that waste-to-energy-schemes should not be considered a renewable energy source but rather, a polluting technology that burns plastic waste for electricity generation and/or heating.

**Recognizing** that as clean, effective and affordable alternatives to the uses of fossil fuel-derived products become available, there is no good reason for global civil society to continue tolerating all the premature deaths and avoidable diseases attributable to pollutants released during the fossil fuel life cycle.

**Being Aware** that virtually all Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), toxic chemical additives, highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs) and industrial solvents, as well as most other toxic chemicals, can be considered products of the fossil fuel life cycle in that they are synthetic organic chemicals; their molecules have a carbon backbone; and they are manufactured using feedstocks derived from oil, gas or coal.

**Being Aware** also that greenhouse gasses released to the atmosphere throughout the fossil fuel life cycle are the primary cause of global warming and climate change.

**Recognizing** the critical importance of achieving the Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goal, which is to keep the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels; and to attempt to limit the increase to 1.5 °C.

**Understanding** that IPEN-supported initiatives aimed at eliminating and controlling toxic pollutants that are generated and released during the fossil fuel life cycle would also contribute to the climate movement's efforts aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mindful** of IPEN's important and unique mission, which is to build and support a global, civil society movement working for a *Toxics-Free Future for All*: a world where humans and other organisms no longer suffer harm from exposures to toxic chemicals, toxic metals and other toxic pollutants.

## Therefore, IPEN Envisions a World Where:

- People and organisms are no longer exposed to toxic pollutants that are generated and released to the environment during the life cycles of coal, oil and natural gas.
- Non-essential uses of plastics have been phased out and replaced with safer alternative products and/or practices.
- Global production of plastic rapidly declines.
- Marine and aquatic environments are no longer polluted with plastic litter and particles; terrestrial landscapes, including urban and rural areas and agricultural lands, are free of plastic litter.
- Plastic wastes are no longer openly burned, no longer incinerated, and no longer used as a fuel for electricity generation or heating.
- No new coal-fired power plants are built; existing coal-fired power plants are quickly phased out.
- Coal mining has stopped.
- Fossil fuel-based electricity generation (coal, oil, diesel and natural gas) has been replaced with clean, cost-effective, efficient, safe and renewable electricity (photovoltaic, wind, geothermal and others); all communities have affordable access to basic electricity services.
- All renewable energy technologies are deployed in ways that are respectful of human rights and the Prior Informed Consent of impacted communities.
- Subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and to fossil fuel-based electricity generation have stopped.
- Oil and gas field exploration and development has ended.
- Unconventional oil and gas extraction (fracking and others) have stopped.
- Uses of materials and chemicals produced from synthetic hydrocarbon feedstocks are progressively replaced with sustainable and cleaner alternatives.
- Oil and natural gas extraction are quickly phased down.
- Global fossil fuel phase-down and minimization is accomplished in ways that take into account conditions and needs of each region. Accompanying economic and societal changes are achieved in the context of a Just Transition for workers and impacted communities, and in accordance with human rights.