

Why We Must Stop Fossil Fuels

Think breast cancer and the global addiction to fossil fuel are two separate crises?

Think again. Fossil fuels take many forms, including oil, gasoline, diesel, natural gas and coal. Many chemicals in our air, water, food and everyday items come from extracting, processing or burning fossil fuels. The use of fossil fuels not only contributes to climate change, it may also increase our risk for developing breast cancer. We can be exposed to these harmful chemicals in places where we live, work, learn and play from sources as varied as vehicle exhaust, industrial operations, pesticides, plastics and many others. It's time to stop fueling breast cancer!

The Fossil Fuel Continuum



Fossil fuels' connection to breast cancer

Every year in the U.S., more than a quarter of a million people are diagnosed with breast cancer—a number that continues to rise. Many of these people have no family history of the disease, which raises the question “What causes breast cancer?” Increasingly, researchers are finding environmental links to the disease, including exposures to fossil fuel-based chemicals. Examples include:

Benzene is a known carcinogen and may increase breast cancer risk.

Common exposure sources: Stored gasoline (such as from lawn mowers or cars in basements or garages attached to a house). Car and truck exhaust. Solvents used in the workplace. Release during fossil fuel extraction, which exposes workers and neighboring communities.

Polyaromatic hydrocarbons or PAHs are a class of chemicals that are released when wood, coal, crude oil, gasoline and diesel are burned. Some of these PAHs, especially from diesel combustion, increase breast cancer risk.

Common exposure sources: Breathing air contaminated with motor vehicle exhaust, fumes from asphalt roads and industrial pollution. Occupational exposures.

Dioxins are highly toxic persistent environmental pollutants that may increase breast cancer risk.

Common exposure sources: Combustion of fossil fuels and waste incineration, metal smelting and refining, chemical manufacturing. Eating food, especially animal products, that have been contaminated.

Pesticides & Herbicides: Some pest and weed control chemicals manufactured from fossil fuels have been linked to hormone disruption and potentially increase risk for breast cancer.

Common exposure sources: Home and yard pest control, occupational settings including landscaping and agriculture, working in or living in proximity to agricultural fields (including through pesticide drift and water contaminated with pesticides), eating food contaminated with pesticides.

Plastic = fossil fuels in solid form

From food packaging to water bottles to toys to cars, everywhere we turn there is plastic. In 2018 alone global plastics production totaled 359 million metric tons. But plastic creates health problems at every step of its lifecycle.



Production: Nearly all plastics are produced from chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, exposing workers and communities near the manufacturing plants to a wide range of pollutants that may increase risk for breast cancer. Women working in plastics production may also be at increased risk.

Use: Plastics are used in everyday products including food and beverage packaging, electronics, medical equipment and much more. Many of these plastics leach hormone disrupting chemicals linked to breast cancer, especially food packaging and plastic water bottles.

Disposal: Huge amounts of plastic are thrown out, and most of it breaks down very slowly. After plastic is disposed of it can leach hormone disrupting chemicals that may increase breast cancer risk, such as phthalates, into the soil, groundwater and ocean water.

Communities of Color Hit First & Worst by the Fossil Fuel Economy

Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities are systematically harmed by fossil fuel industry operations. This disproportionate harm arises from numerous sources:

- **Systematic racism**—for example, racial bias in industrial zoning—has led to communities of color being burdened with higher everyday exposures to pollution from fossil fuel-based industries, such as chemical and plastic manufacturers.
- **Communities of color near industrial facilities are at increased risk of exposure.** As climate change linked to burning fossil fuels intensifies, extreme weather events—such as hurricanes and flooding—are expected to increase, contributing to chemical spills and accidents that further increase toxic exposures.
- **Decades of racially biased urban planning practices** have led to a greater concentration of highways, ports, and trainlines in communities of color. Higher densities of transportation zones that depend on fossil fuels expose residents to higher levels of benzene, PAHs and other air pollutants that can increase breast cancer risk.

A transition from fossil fuel dependence to renewable energy and non-toxic products can create economic opportunity, but these efforts must be led by people of color and create jobs for people in their communities.

To end the breast cancer epidemic, we must turn off the tap on the fossil fuel economy. Cancer diagnoses continue to grow, yet only around 15 percent of all breast cancers are linked to family history. It's time to end exposure to cancer-causing chemicals, hormone disruptors, and other toxins of concern throughout the fossil fuel continuum. **It's time to stop fueling the cancer crisis!**

Join our work to power down the cancer-causing, fossil fuel economy and call for safe alternatives.

Learn more and join us in action at www.bcaction.org