

ENERGY

Ottawa targets oil-sands opponents

'ADVOCACY STRATEGY'

Financial Post Nov 22/10 FP2
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OTTAWA • Three major departments in the federal government have been co-ordinating a communications strategy with Alberta and its fossil-fuel industry to fight international global-warming policies that "target" oil-sands production, newly released federal documents reveal.

The documents, obtained by Postmedia News, suggest that Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, have collaborated on an "advocacy strategy" in the U.S. to promote the oil sands and discourage environmental-protection policies.

"The activities of the oil-sands sector has emerged as one of the high-priority files for the federal government," wrote Natural Resources Canada policy advisor Paul Khanna in an email, on behalf of Kevin Stringer, director of Petroleum Resources in the same department.

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"As a result we have developed several products that provide the department's views on oil-sands development ... and we have contributed (along with EC) to a DFAIT led 'Advocacy Strategy' on oil sands for the U.S."

The email, dated Dec. 1, 2008, is part of hundreds of pages of documents released through an access-to-information request by Climate Action Network Canada.

The documents also include a powerpoint presentation outlining the communications strategy in 2009 and secret briefing notes that urge the natural resources minister to fight back against "well-orchestrated media campaigns" against the oil sands as well as "restrictive legislative and regulatory proposals that associate oil sands with 'dirty oil.'"

The presentation highlights the economic importance of the oil sands as a resource that places Canada second in world oil reserves, but also acknowledges development is threatened by U.S. environmental concerns and climate policies.

"U.S. legislation at both federal and state levels potentially target oil-sands production," says a Natural Resources Canada presentation from March 2009 called *Addressing Oil Sands Issues in the United States*.

"Some [environmental groups] have targeted oil sands in proactive, well financed and well organized 'dirty oil' campaigns," it says.

Meanwhile, the documents say the government is developing a "proactive outreach strategy" as part of its communications plan in partnership with other stakeholders, such as the oil-sands industry and the Alberta government, which launched its own \$25-million campaign in 2008.

"Engagement with [environmental groups] has been limited, but we will seek opportunities where we can," the presentation says.

The documents also reveal the government is aware most Canadians want stronger action to crack down on oil-sands pollution. They highlight public opinion research that

We will seek opportunities

suggests 72% of Canadians want it to do more and 79% want emissions to be reduced from current levels.

Greenhouse-gas pollution from the oil sands has tripled since 1990. The government's research also suggests 52% of Canadians support a moratorium on new development until environmental issues are resolved.

The coalition that obtained the documents said the revelations may represent only a fraction of international lobbying efforts by the Harper government, including recent letters sent to European politicians to discourage similar policies targeting pollution from the oil sands.

Postmedia News