

[ca. 1975 Oil and the Environment Pamphlet, Imperial Oil Ltd.](#)

Other version: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5015347-Oil-and-the-Environment.html>

These documents are two versions of a pamphlet on “Oil and the Environment” published in the mid-1970’s by Imperial Oil Ltd., the Canadian subsidiary of Exxon, presumably prepared for public distribution. The documents demonstrate Imperial’s concern with their public image, particularly public perception of their environmental impact. Their concern with environmental PR is laid out explicitly in their [1971 report on research requirements and priorities](#). This document is part of the ClimateFiles Imperial Oil document set, gleaned by DeSmog researchers from the Glenbow Imperial Oil Archive Collection.

Both versions of the pamphlet state that Imperial’s struggle with pollution “isn’t a new fight,” and is part of the long history of human interaction with the environment going back to “8,000 years ago in Mesopotamia, where irrigation was invented.” Pollution and environmental degradation is also presented as an inevitability: “with three billion people on earth, man cannot help but contaminate the environment to some extent.”

The pamphlets go on to define various kinds of pollution, including air, water, and noise pollution, and explains some of the precautions taken by Imperial to minimize its own impacts. In doing so, however, the pamphlets also clarify expectations, reminding the reader that “you’ll probably never breathe pure air. Pure air contains 78 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen. The other one percent is mostly carbon dioxide and argon, with traces of neon, helium, xenon, hydrogen, methane, krypton, and water vapor. Strictly speaking, air becomes polluted whenever anything is added to that mixture.” The documents are also careful to point out the ways in which Imperial’s existing practices fall within the standards of international treaties and regulations, specifying that “a subcommittee of the United Nations agrees that oily water may be discharged into the oceans” during ballasting or tank-cleaning operations.

In a section on air pollution, both pamphlets sheds light on Imperial’s projections for the future of automobile emissions. In the mid- to late-1970s, when this pamphlet was written, Imperial reported that “the goal for the middle-to-late 1970s is an essentially pollution-free automobile.”

These documents go on to emphasize the importance of the Arctic region in the future of oil exploration and extraction, noting that “an Imperial refinery has operated there since 1932,” and concluding that “The oil search must continue as long as Canadians need fuel for home heating, gasoline for automobiles, and petrochemicals for thousands of other objects of our daily lives.”

More documents from Imperial Oil Limited can be found in our full collection [here](#).